覇剣の皇姫アルティーナ

はけんのこうき アルティーナ

ALTINA the Sword Princess

III

Yukiya Murasaki
むらさきゆきや
ill. himesuz

ファミ通文庫

ALT
the Sword
“I trust you” Altina and The bibliophagic boy face difficulties together.

Chapter 1 - Towns and Stagecoach

The military carriage advanced slowly in the darkness of the wilderness with the aid of the oil lamp head lights.

The fortress in front was erected over a mountain.

In the middle of the mountain, black cannons were arranged neatly in a row,

The gate in the middle opened slowly to the side as the torches in the surrounding were lit one by one, strong soldiers held on to their pikes warily.

Two months ago, this was still Varden Duchy's famed invincible fortress. But now, it was part of the Belgaria empire, Fort Volks under the Marie Quatre army.

The driver picked up the oil lamp and passed the information to the soldiers as dictated by the doctrines.

The guard at the main gate confirmed the contents before reporting to his commander.

A moment later.

The guard commander appeared and saluted Regis with his right hand on his left chest.

"Thank you for your hard work, Sir strategist."

"... Ah, same to you... Thank you for your hard work."

Regis who was seated beside the driver lowered his head in a panic. The commander was a old veteran noble of the empire, and held an important post in the army.

Regis was known as 'the strategist that took down Fort Volks' and was highly evaluated in the empire.

-- the one who was victorious was Altina.

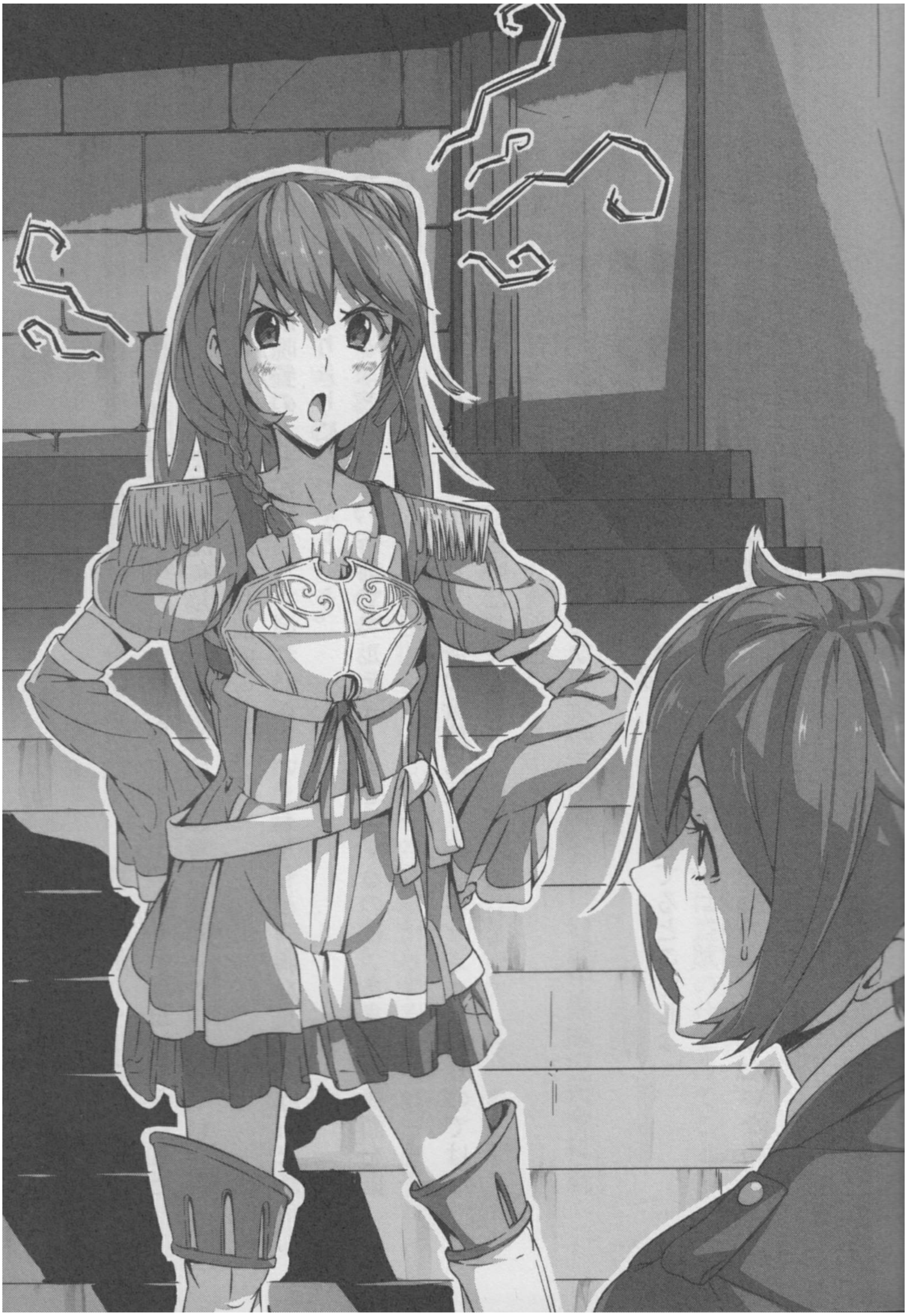
Regis didn't say it out loud and just mumbled in his heart.

The carriage stopped at a cave dug from the walls. Regis thanked the driver politely and prepared to return to his room.

Regis carried his luggage and headed towards his room via the stairway. He pondered about the problem of there being too many stairs in this fort.

"Hmm?"

"You are finally back, Regis."



Regis met the young girl Altina, commander of the army who was on her way down.

"Ah~, Altina."

In the presence of others, Regis would think about their social position and address Altina as 'princess'. Being too informal might affect the morale of the troops.

But Altina had requested him to use her nickname whenever possible.

Normally, people won't need to worry when talking to a 14 year old girl... But Altina's beauty could make Regis lose himself sometimes.

Her long flame like hair flowed down her back, bright ruby eyes, and porcelain white skin that didn't become damaged because of her swordsmanship training.

Her alluring pink lips were pouting.

No no no, don't think any more, Regis composed himself and walked towards Altina.

"Regis, did you go to town again?"

"Ahh, yes, don't worry. I didn't splurge any money."

"I will stop worrying when you return all the money you owe me."

"Ugh, well... Soon, soon."

"Really, it had been so long I almost forgot your name."

"Eh? It hadn't been long, just 3 days right?"

"Not just 3 days! And you didn't tell me you were leaving."

"Well..."

Regis knew if he told Altina in advance, she would come up with all sorts of reasons to stop him.

But if they went together, they would need a security party for the commander. And a long trip was coming up, so Altina would have to put up with this for now.

"Why did you leave without saying anything..."

"I went to town because of errands, doesn't Altina have duties in the fort too?"

"Alright, I get it. But tell me if you are going out next time."

"Erm... Yeah."

Altina had been acting like this since fort Volks was taken. Recently, she had been acting like a lonely child.

It wouldn't be surprising for a normal man to harbor feelings for Altina. But Regis had low self esteem, had never thought much about women, and their social gap was really big.

-- Altina's uneasiness probably stemmed from her upcoming meeting with the 2nd prince Latreille.

To make the strong willed Altina so meek, the 2nd prince is a terrifying existence-- Regis thought.

"Altina, it will be fine. Prince Latreille was the subject of bad rumours, no matter how weak your position may be, it is still better than him."

Prince Latreille poisoned the first prince Auguste so he would be next in line to the throne-- such baseless rumours were spreading in the empire.

Between July and August last year, Auguste suddenly vomited blood when he was having dinner and fainted. He had always been frail and never left his residence since then.

Hence, if Altina was attacked in the capital, Latreille's reputation would plummet. Latreille would definitely want to avoid that.

Under such circumstances, Regis was more worried about the nobles on Auguste's side sending assassins after Altina.

Altina tilted her head and said:

"Hmm? Why are you mentioning Latreille suddenly?"

"...Ah, huh?

"As a man, it was mean of you to leave without saying anything."

"Well, I am a man who is serious about work."

Eh, only the protagonist in novels could soothe the uneasiness of a lady's heart, it's impossible for me-- Regis shrugged.

Altina changed the topic.

"By the way, Auguste's residence caught fire recently."

"Ahh, I heard about that... From the information gathered from the streets, the empire's official stance says it was the work of bandits, there are no rumours about it being an assassination attempt."

"Assassination?"

"The empire's guard regiment announced 'this incident was caused by bandits who were after the valuable paintings in the residence'. The guard commander Baudouin resigned because of that."

"Ara, forget the villa, even the palace was burning, I'm glad Auguste is okay."

Altina was the 4th in line for the throne and was aiming to be empress. Considering her position, the first prince being safe wasn't a good thing-- Altina probably didn't consider that and was just happy her brother was safe.

What if Altina hoped for her brother's demise? Regis didn't think deeper and advanced the topic.

"Major general Baudouin is a noble supporting Latreille. Allowing his resignation without further investigation is baffling."

"Hmm? What do you mean? As guard commander, he has to take responsibility for not being prepared for the bandits?"

"Well... Think about it, no matter how valuable the painting, the bandits won't target prince Auguste's villa right? Doesn't this imply that the guard commander became an abandoned chess piece after failing to assassinate prince Auguste?"

Altina frowned.

"Regis, you are making it too complicated, I don't understand."

"Oh, is that so? From the looks of things, we should plan for the worst."

"Are you confident with your deduction?"

"Yes, the poisoning incident half a year ago was definitely the same, a scheme acted out by the people in the palace. They just changed the script. Instead of a drama, this is closer to the story in a novel."

"Quoting your books again?"

"Ah, no... No matter what the truth is, we have to take all precautions right? The destination for our trip is the capital this time, so it can't be helped."

"Right, Be it a snake or ghost that is causing trouble, we would feel safer with a sword in hand. Isn't that right?"

"That proverb is probably not meant to describe courage though."

"Ah, eh, right."

As they were chit chatting, the sound of clanking armor drew near.

Looking towards the source of the sound, they saw a large man appearing in the stairway with loud footsteps.

Sharp wild eyes stared right at them, His face had a hint of unhappiness on his lips. The broad shoulder and tight muscles made the man look dignified.

He was the hero with the notoriety of the black knight, Margrave Jerome Jean de Beilschmidt.

"What are you two doing?"

"Erm... I'm making a report about Major General Baudouin's resignation to take responsibility."

"Baudouin? Major general? I never heard that name before."

"He was appointed as the imperial capital's guard commander recently. Because of the bandit attack on the villa, he took responsibility and resigned."

"Oh, the capital's guard commander, the trash who was great at sending his charges to death while hogging the glory to himself."

Jerome was a veteran general who left the safety of the capital. He was criticized strongly by the soldiers who grabbed the glory during the civil war. That was the norm for the front line soldiers.

"Regis, putting that trash aside, how did that matter go?"

"... Everything is in place."

The relevant personnel were gathered in the commander's office.

Fort Volks, commander's office--

Germania built the fort into the mountain, so this place had nothing to do with elegance. The white walls and plain black tables decorated this simple room. After capturing this place, the only decoration was just a vase.

Hung on the wall was the flag designed by Altina personally. It had green as its base colour with a giant shield in the middle.

Four people were seated around the sturdy table.

Altina who was wearing gauntlets and shin guard over her gown, the tactician Regis, general Jerome and the knight Evrard who was at the prime of his life.

After Regis finished his report gathered from town--

There was a sudden knocking on the door.

"This is Eric Michael de Blanchard."

"Ah, enter."

"Yes!"

A young knight who was not yet 16 walked, his blond hair flowing down his back. He wore his military uniform neatly, the perfect example for the term pretty boy. His voice had a high pitch befitting a girl too.

Eric was Evrard's grandson... But Evrard's bald head, thick black beard and muscles like a gorilla bared no similarity with Eric.

Regis looked towards Altina and explained the situation in detail.

Regis stood up and took the files from Eric and said:

"You are volunteering to be Altina's escort, recommendation was made by Evrard, is that it?"

"Yes! Please allow me to take on this appointment!"

"... The safety of her highness outside of the fort will be in your hands. I am counting on you!"

"I swear on my life!"

Eric closed his lips tight and saluted.

Altina smiled when she saw this scene.

"I will be in your care."

At this moment, Evrard who made the recommendation had an unexpectedly heavy expression.

"I wanted to protect her highness with my own sword."

"That would be troubling for me... Evrard is the guard commander of the fort after all."

Beilschmidt Border Regiment was currently based in Fort Volks. A regiment with 6000 troops, its scale is closer to a brigade. Recently, the soldiers had been calling themselves the Marie Quatre army.

The command structure of the regiment was as follows;

Working under Commander Altina is General Jerome, Strategist Regis and Guard Commander Evrard.

General Jerome commands 500 black knights, 500 mercenary riders, 1000 artillery, 1000 infantry and 2000 mercenaries.

Guard commander Evrard had 1000 fort guards and escort officer Eric.

As for others such as doctors, cooks, armorers and drivers, they had no clear supervising officers.

For the Belgarian empire, all matters within the regiment was decided by the commander.

In this era where communication is done through physical letters, it’s impossible to expect detailed instructions from the capital. Hence, the border commanders were the highest authority in their territory.

Since the previous commander Jerome wasn't concerned with the matters of the brigade, the command structure was severely lacking.

As the command system didn't include cooks and armorers, they were rostered right next to the strategist Regis in the organization chart.

As the seniority of appointments were not clear for some cases, addressing someone could be confusing during staff meetings.

Looking at the saluting Eric, Jerome laughed through his nose.

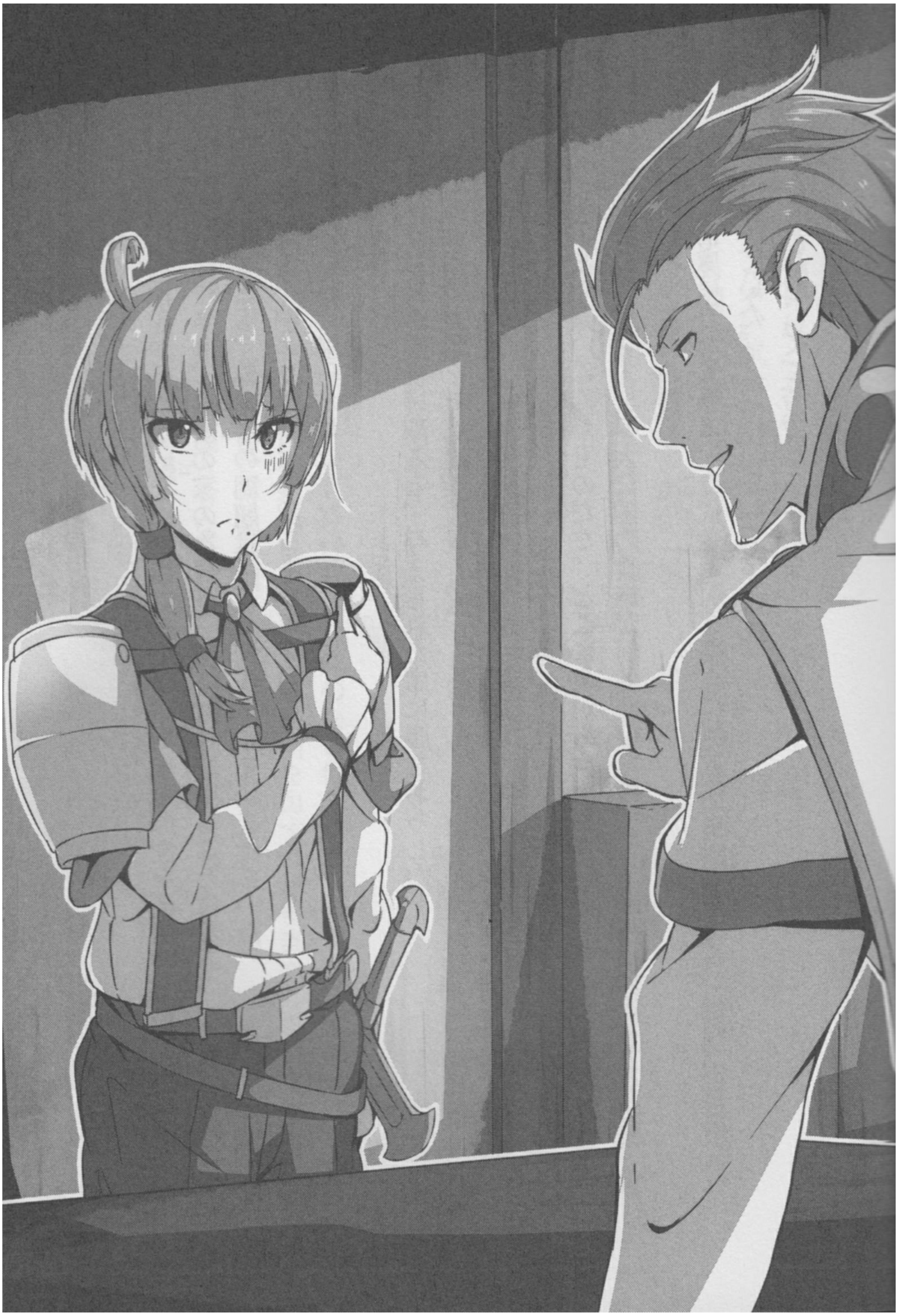
"Hmm, does this princess really need a guard?"

"Didn't you think the same in the beginning?"

"Fufufu... Compared to the escort, the one being protected is stronger instead."

"Ugh..."

Eric lowered his head and pursed his lips.



Compared to you, Altina is stronger. It is normal for most people to think that way, since the princess was a match for the hero Jerome.

When he thought of this, Regis shook his head.

"... The princess' sword is too prominent, especially in the capital."

Upon hearing this, Altina looked impressed.

"I got it. Please do your best in places where I can’t bring my sword."

"That's right, there would be a 3 day festival on founding day, and her highness would be attending in the position of the royal princess."

It’s inconvenient to move with that sword which was taller than a man while wearing a gown.

"I hate gowns! Being armed with a sword should be the norm if I am attending as a soldier."

"Don't say such rash words."

"But Latreille wore a sword!?"

"... Because he is the commander in chief of the first army."

"I am the commander of this regiment too."

"... I know, but... Latreille is a man."

"Ugggghhhhh... how frustrating! I won't acknowledge this!!!"

In this era, there were wide distinctions between a man and a woman. Even if their status were the same, the men enjoyed more privileges than the women.

For example, if the child of a noble was a girl, the other male in the family wouldn't treat her as a successor of the clan. The line of succession would fall onto her younger brothers.

Among royalty, this posed all sort of problems.

Altina gestured to Eric.

"Well, forget it. Take a seat."

"Ye, yes!"

Eric sat down after receiving the order.

Regis put the next document onto the table.

"Sir Jerome, these are the files for that issue. I have written down in detail the things to prepare."

"Hmmp, buying things again? Where did you get the money?"

"Some of the prisoners of war were nobles in the Varden Duchy... It's not much, but we won't be able to use it anyway if we lose."

The nobles captured during wars could be repatriated for a sum of money, which was an important source of funds for the army.

"It must be hard to have prepared this much."

"In terms of combat prowess, we are still the underdog, we have to make preparations to make up for it."

"They outnumber us several folds, and that is not something that can be settled with just fighting spirit."

"It's great that Sir Jerome thinks this way too... We can't afford to take any losses for our knights, so we need to avoid battle."

"Even if it’s me, I won't make unnecessary sacrifice on the spur of the moment. So stop using those annoying tricks of yours."

"Thank you, I will definitely do that."

"Erm, using stratagem in the battle field isn't bad. But remember Regis, cowards on the battlefield are the ones closest to death.

"... Thank you for your advice, I will keep that in mind."

Jerome took the documents from the table and put it in his pocket after a glance.

Altina said with a stunned expression:

"What was written on it?"

"... A back up plan in case of emergencies. Preparation others won't see if we don't do anything... The next time the empire summon us, I will set up camp near the capital with my black knights, I think that would be better."

"I feel the same way, but is it okay to act so arrogantly within the empire's territory?"

"That might be so, but it’s not strange to have an escort of such scale for royalty."

"Isn't that just putting up a false front?"

Altina refuted the statement with a hand gesture.

"... But as a royalty, wouldn't bringing too few escorts invite ridicule?"

These words had the opposite effect and Altina's eyes turned sharp.

"Wouldn't we be the same as those nobles if we do that? I think splurging our tax money out of vanity isn't right! We should travel the same way as commoners in coaches."

"What, what did you say? Isn't it obvious that that is impossible?... Ah, no, I mean this is beneath your status, your highness."

"Didn't Regis travel this way from the capital to Tuonvell? On a coach, and the cheapest one at that."

"That's because the unit's funds were running low though."

"... Ugh~~"

"It's decided! We travel by coach! I have never took one before, I am looking forward to it!"

"Well..."

"Absolutely not!! I won't allow such a dangerous thing!"

Before Regis could object, Evrard's protested loudly and Eric nodded in agreement.

Jerome seemed to be enjoying himself, laughing heartily.

"Fu haha! Isn't that great? Let her go if she wants to, let the others laugh at her."

"... What exactly did the people in the palace tell you..."

What a failure-- Regis thought as he hugged his head, he shouldn't have mentioned the budget in front of Altina.

Altina pondered about the words she heard from Regis for a long time and made an unreasonable reply.

A royalty mingling with the peasants, traveling to the capital by coach.

"... Ah... I read something like this from a book."

In the book he read previously, he saw a similar plot development.

Altina looked uneasy.

"What is it Regis? Are you angry?"

"Ah, no... thinking carefully, this isn't a bad idea. The nobles would pick on us anyway, like the color of the dress or the hair accessories..."

Since they would be criticized for acting conservative, why not make a gamble.

Altina's dream couldn't be achieved by taking the normal path.

Year of the empire 851 April 9th--

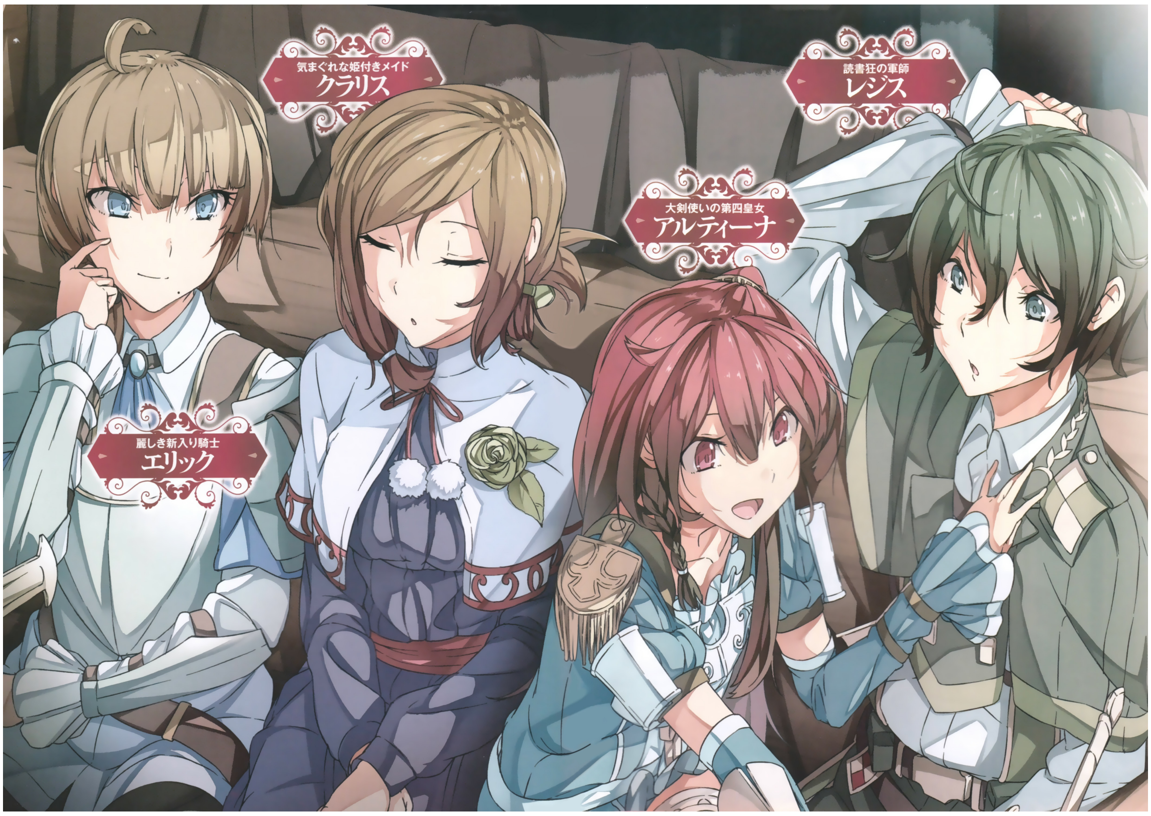
The coach set off in the morning fog.

4 chestnut colored large horses shook their heads as they advanced at a steady pace.

This was a coach similar to the one that makes a daily round trip from Tuonvell town and Fort Sierck.

This coach could seat 12 passengers at once, with 3 rows of 4 seats. The top of the coach is the cargo compartment.

Seated in the middle row were Regis, Altina, Clarisse and Eric.


読書狂の軍師
レジス
大剣使いの第四皇女
アルティーナ
気まぐれな姫付きメイド
クラリス
麗しき新入り騎士
エリック

Clarisse was the personal maid of the princess, accompanying her since her days in the capital and was a lady two years older than Regis.

Her long brown hair flowed down her back, she wasn't in maid uniform as she was traveling. In its place, she wore a blue one piece skirt with a red band around her waist and a white shawl on her shoulders.

Her elegant features made her look more like a lady attendant than a maid.

The seating order starting from the right were Regis, Altina, Clarisse and Eric. The men were seated on either side to protect the ladies.

This was so even for Regis who had the weakest arm strength.

Altina smiled awkwardly after looking at Regis' waist area.

"How rare to see you wear a sword."

"... I felt it was weird not to bring anything, so I searched for it in my room yesterday."

Regis said after tapping the sword on his waist:

"That's right, a soldier without a weapon is not a soldier. When I heard you pawned your sword some time ago, I was wondering what happened."

"Ugh... Sorry for making you worry."

(I pawned my weapon to get the money to buy books, but Altina fortunately loaned the money to me and repaid all the money on hand.)

"Are you doing maintenance seriously?"

"It's no good if you don't treasure it..."

"Even I will oil my sword properly too."

Altina's sword was known as the "Grand Tonnerre Quatre", and was rumored to be bestowed by the fairies to the founding "L’Empereur Flamme" made from Tristei.

Any weapon which opposes it would be shattered into pieces, and would not be damaged by spears or guns. It was rumored to never rust, bend or break.

But the sword was bigger than Altina, so it was placed in the cargo compartment on top of the coach.

To add on, Tristei was hypothesised by researchers to be 'a natural alloy'. An artificial alloy developed using this theory were being mass produced in High Britannia because of its excellent quality.

Regis felt slight resistance when he drew the sword from its sheathe. But the sword was then pulled out smoothly, displaying its shiny body.

"... The condition looks great."

"Ara, that's unexpected. I thought you would ignore it, I have a better impression of you now."

"... I did ignore it. I saw Eric polishing my sword though."

"Give my feelings back!! Return them!!"

"Ah, even if you say that..."

Altina turned to Clarisse's position and said while looking at Eric.

"That's not good, don't spoil him!"

"Yes! But sir strategist seemed really busy, so I help him with sword maintenance since I can't help in other ways. Is that alright?"

"I know he is busy, but--"

Altina turned to face Regis.

"If that is the case, you could have just asked me, why did you let Eric do it?"

"Eh?? Erm... Using common sense, isn't it weird for a 5th grade officer to trouble a major general for sword maintenance?"

"Why would it be, I am free anyway."

"If that is the case, go and settle that mountain of documents..."

"Ah!! I see the castle! Is that castle Sierck?"

Altina used a strong voice to direct everyone's gaze over there.

Altina stood while leaning on her sword. She was great at analysing issues, but was lacking in reading and writing, always looking to avoid paper work.

That's why documents that did not require the commander to sign off were handled by Regis. It wasn't much compared to Regis' total workload...

Regis simply shrugged when he saw this, while Eric simply smiled awkwardly.

Clarisse was as still as a mannequin, because she knew Altina and Regis were just playing around. She would normally smile as well, but Clarisse always showed her poker face in the presence of people besides Altina and Regis.

Aside from Eric, the rows in front and behind were full of soldiers.

The strong soldiers wore light armor under their jacket. They also wore their sword, making their clothes look like a tight fit.

The coach was loaned by the empire army right now.

This was Regis' suggestion.

"We might be mocked by the nobles, but we will earn the respect of the commoners, it's a good trade off."

"You read that in a book too?"

"Yes."

"What do you think? Would a commander gain the goodwill of the citizens by riding in such a coach?"

"Yes, compared to riding in luxurious carriages, doing it this way will garner more support from the people."

"But there is a theory among the aristocrats that 'when the ruler looks extravagant, the citizens will feel proud'."

"... It might be so for prosperous places like the imperial capital, but we are situated to the north, near the borders and are impoverished."

"That is true, when life is hard for the peasants and the rulers act extravagantly saying 'be proud of how elegant your lords are', how infuriating is that."

"Among the aristocrats, there are many who can't understand this."

"Erm, I might think that is so before this. Thanks for telling me all that, Regis."

"Ah... No... This is your highness' proposal in the first place."

Renting a coach and riding it along with the escorts, he only heard of such stories in books.

The coach moved slowly in the wilderness, going deeper into the forest.

After capturing Fort Volks, the empire revitalized the road leading to it. Because of the barbarians in the forest, the guards were very tense.

Altina leaned towards Regis and whispered into her ears:

Will Diethart be fine?

"... It's fine, I told Bargainheim about this trip, so this forest is in some ways safer than the capital."

Regis told Altina in a volume too low for others to hear.

On the 1st day, the coach stopped by the Margrave's mansion to rest.

Elin intruded on the room, causing a quarrel with Clarisse again, Altina drew her sword but was unable to calm them down...

The rented stagecoach headed for the next destination.

Altina was in a great mood.

"The people in town had came to send us off~"

"That's right, there were unexpectedly many who are there to express good will."

"Especially those in the merchant guild... What did we do?"

"... Hahaha..."

(What an eye for detail) Regis laughed awkwardly.

"Could it be, you... You hired them to send us off?"

"Even I wouldn't do such despicable things. Because of this expedition, I had to preorder furniture and equipment from them, that's why..."

"I see."

Regis wondered if everyone present received jobs from him. The large purchases injected the town with energy, the enthusiastic crowd was there to bid their client goodbye.

"If raising their materialistic entertainment is a compliment to those in power, that isn't too bad."

"That's right!"

Seeing the citizens of Tuonvell smiling from the bottom of their heart and expressing gratitude towards Regis, Altina felt what she had done was right.

Serving the Belgarian empire Beilschmidt border regiment, Abidal Evra was grade 2 combat officer, 38 years old.

Born a commoner, he was the youngest of the family of 6 children. Due to his strong body, the skills he had from training with his brothers and his righteous personality, he was evaluated highly by the hero Jerome. He was granted knighthood for his efforts and is now part of nobility.

Right now, he was shouldering the honor of his clan as he continued to work hard.

After the training session ended, General Jerome called him over.

"Abidal Evra, what do you think of Regis and Eric?"

"Sir! An excellent strategist and a promising knight, general!"

"And the princess?"

"A popular commander!"

"Hmm... This answer really fits your style. Okay, Abidal Evra, you will take charge of the security party for the expedition to the capital."

"Sir! It's an honor!"

This was as Abidal Evra expected. (I heard the royal princess was attending the founding day party, general Jerome couldn't leave as he was the covering commander. Sir Evrard was the guard commander, so who else but me could take on this mission?) Abidal

Evra thought a bit vainly.

But what Jerome said next baffled Abidal Evra.

"You will be taking a stagecoach and including you, there will be 8 guards."

"Sir! Eh??? A stagecoach? 8 men? Can we protect her highness with these numbers?"

"You can't do it?"

"Ah, no, I can do it if the general wills it!"

"Good, that is all I have for you. This plan was proposed by Regis, he must had scrutinised it carefully, carry on with your duties."

"Sir! Understood, general!"

The hand he was using to salute was trembling.

(Could this be some sort of conspiracy? A plot to kill me along with the princess? Am I bait? Am I fated to die?) These questions haunted Abidal Evra through the night.

The other members of the 8 were less able than him, they were all soldiers picked from forgotten clans.

The residence of the savages was the forest that was full of life.

It felt safer in Sierck fort and Tuonvell town.

Gradually, they reached the streets.

The escort duties were normally performed by a thousand soldiers, but there were only 8 guards including himself.

Abidal Evra's palms were sweating.

The royal princess Marie Quatre was shouting happily.

"Ah Regis! Is that a relay station?"

"... That's right, could this be your first time seeing one?"

"I was surrounded by layers of soldiers when I came from the capital to Sierck fort, so I couldn't see anything and the road was filled with carriages."

"... Well, that should be normal."

Of course! Abidal Evra agreed with the strategist in his heart.

But the strategist should have intervened in this ridiculous situation. He couldn't understand what the strategist was thinking.

Setting off from Tuonvell town, they reached the first relay station after 2 hours.

There was a hilly farmland in the area. It was early April, the season where flowers bloomed, making this place even more beautiful.

In this poor farming village was a small relay station.

The stagecoach briefly stopped here for the horses to rest, and a room for travelers to take a break.

"Good work everyone, let's rest for 30 minutes."

The driver announced.

If it was a normal relay station, the passengers would spread out and chat among themselves.

But Abidal Evra's 8 men team were well trained soldiers with the mission to protect the royal princess.

They hastily dismounted from the stagecoach and took up sentry positions around the area as planned.

Abidal Evra opened the wooden door of the stagecoach from the outside.

According to the seating order, the first to alight was the strategist Regis.

"... Ah, thank you."

Regis frantically pulled his head back.

Swish! Abidal Evra saluted immediately.

The strategist leaned forward and dismounted. What capabilities was this impeccable man hiding?

Fort Volks was well known for being invulnerable before Abidal Evra was even born, but it was taken down by him so easily.

Even I was granted knighthood, so why was he still a 5th grade admin officer without a nobility title?

Knighthood was a nobility title that was only bestowed with great accomplishments. With this title, you will receive higher pay and the rights to buy and sell merchandize freely.

After Regis got off, next was the royal princess Marie Quatre.

Her crimson hair fluttered in the wind, showing glimpses of her snow white neck.

She was a beautiful lady.

Not only was her beauty astounding, her regular training made her body slender, giving off a graceful feeling even though she was simply getting off the stagecoach.

Looking up at her figure with the clear sky as a background, it was like a grand painting in the church.

This was the first time Abidal Evra made contact with the royal princess from such a close distance, making him nervous.

The next to get out was the maid, and the last to go out was Eric.

At that moment, another soldier was checking the safety of the resting area, sending a 'all okay' hand sign.

Abidal Evra lowered his head and asked respectfully:

"Your highness, please rest over here."

"Hmm... I know you mean well... But after such a long ride, my butt is starting to hurt."

"What!! Doctor! Get a doctor quick!"

“Wait! Wait! No need for that! The seat was just a bit stiff."

"Yes! Please take my seat then."

Forget it, the royal gestured with a wave.

The strategist who headed this way because of the commotion smiled happily.

"Hahaha... Seems like it is hard for the aristocrats to ride in stagecoaches."

"That's not how I feel! This is not the problem of stagecoaches. Right now, I am very~ happy alright?"

"Is that so, that's great. If we don't take the stagecoaches now, I don't think we could make it to the festival in time..."

"Uguu~~, Regis thinks the festival is more important than my butt."

"... It's no big deal to change to a coach for me... But it would be bad if the citizens think you were late because 'your butt hurts'."

"It does feels off..."

"This might lead to an unflattering name, you already have one..."

"Ahh, I get it, I said I am fine. By the way Regis, doesn't your butt hurt?"

"... Now that you mention it, it does sting a little when I stand up; the seat was probably too hard. But I have gotten used to the stiff chair in the office, so I’m good.”

“How sly~”

“Well… That can’t be helped.”

Looking at the princess puffing her cheeks, the strategist smiled awkwardly.

The two of them seemed to have a great relationship, Abidal Evra who was watching them was surprised.

Abidal Evra felt that soldiers from common birth would have some gap with their superiors, even more so for royalty.

The maid beside the princess started making tea in the pantry, and served it over on a tray. As porcelain tea sets scratches easily, the tea set was made from silver.

“Your highness, the tea is ready.”

“Ah, thank you Clarisse, are the share for the others ready?”

“Yes.”

“Sorry for the trouble.”

A gentle smile appeared on the princess’ face and she looked over to Abidal Evra.

“There is still some time, let’s have tea together.”

“Eh?? But… we still have our duties.”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. The weather is great and visibility is clear. We will see if anyone draws near.”

“Is, is that so…”

“When it’s time to rest, rest. That’s the job of the soldiers. It would be troubling if you get tired when it’s time to work. Here, for you.”

Abidal Evra received a teacup from the royal princess.

Abidal Evra’s rugged hands carefully received the silver cup, looking at it as if it was a treasure.

“Well then, let’s dig in everyone.”

“Yes! Get the others over too.”

“Understood-- Escort team!!! Assemble!!”

After all the guards had drank their share, they prepared to set off.

The seating arrangement was the same as before, with Abidal Evra seated in the center of the back row. His back was straight, in order to protect the things he needed to.

And so, the princess and the strategist started their idle chat.

“We changed the horse.”

“Yes, this is the advantage in stagecoaches… The horses of knights are tied to the individuals, and the military horses go through battle training, so they can’t be changed... But the horses of the stagecoach can be changed after reaching a relay station. It’s really convenient.”

“Who do the horses at the relay station belong to?”

“... This road is under the direct jurisdiction of the empire, and a transport ministry was formed. Transport ministry take charge of the streets, harbor and the bureaucracy. For counties, the stagecoaches are run by the territorial lords.”

“I see.”

“The place to change tired horses are the relay stations, which give rise to stagecoaches.”

“That sounds convenient, why don’t the military adopt such a method?”

“... It’s not feasible in the frontlines of the north. In the south, the army had their own transport network. It’s not possible if the units are too large, so it’s only used for emergencies.”

“Regis has been to the south before?”

“I only read it in a book.”

“Ah, right, how Regis-like.”

The coach advanced slowly.

At this pace, they should reach the next relay station right on time.

The royal princess’ tone became stricter.

“Regis, after we have accomplished our goal for this trip, I have something I need to do.”

“What?”

“Order changing the seats of all stagecoach to be softer.”

As she spoke, the royal princess adjusted her sitting position.

On the 6th morning after Altina’s group left fort Volks--

After traveling 100Li (444km) over rugged roads, Altina’s group was getting tired.

Regis looked at Altina who was seated beside him.

Altina was resting her head on Clarisse’s shoulder and sleeping soundly, Clarisse would be really tired if he leave her be.

“... Are you fine, Clarisse?”

“Yes, I’m okay.”

“... We will reach the capital soon, so please bear with it.”

Suddenly, soldiers appeared ahead and the streets turned rowdy.

“The cavalry is coming!!”

Hearing this, a tense air hung within the coach.

Abidal Evra became alert instantly.

“What!?”

“Your highness… please adjust your dressing.”

After saying that, Regis poked his head out of the window.

On the wide streets, cavalries were drawing near with the rising dust.

While Clarisse wiped Altina's mouth with her handkerchief, Altina asked something while mumbling.

“Hmmm… who is it?!”

Whose units were these, Regis wondered as he shifted his gaze to the unit's flag.

"... Red background, golden lion, sun… ah… this is the empire's first army, the troops under the 2nd prince, general Latreille."

Hearing this, the tension in the coach reached the boiling point.

Everyone made their resolve to die.

Altina and Latreille were political enemies, which was confirmed when the unreasonable orders to capture fort Volks was passed down.

Was Altina's ambition to aim for the throne as the 4th princess exposed…

Compared to the crown prince Auguste who gave up his administrative duties due to ill health and the 3rd prince Bastian who was still schooling, Altina shouldn't attract too much attention in the capital.

Looking at the soldiers with murderous intent before them, Regis used a steady tone and said:

"...Everyone calm down, this is the open street at noon. We will reach the capital just by climbing over that hill, so there is lots of traffic here… No matter what, at such a place, Latreille who already displayed his flag won't draw his sword on us. To me, I think they are testing our etiquette."

I see, Abidal Evra was impressed as he thought about it.

"A sudden attack luring us to lose our composure. Attempting to make us disregard our etiquette, forcing the popularity of the royal princess to fall. Is that their goal?"

"If we perform some weird actions, we might allow our adversary to get their way."

"Eh, we were soldiers from the capital in the past, we won't do anything that would make the royal princess lose face."

“Yes, I’m counting on you… I will do my best to prevent that from happening too.”

Regis said with the most serene tone possible.

The young Eric still had an uneasy expression while Clarisse was calm as usual.

Altina pinched her dress tightly.

“Maybe, I am not good in dealing with this. In the past, Latreille reminded me to watch how I act.”

“Was this the reason you were not good with handling prince Latreille?”

“That guy is too sensitive, he even got mad when I didn’t place my fork and knife properly okay!?”

“... I was warned by my sister about that too… Now should be fine, there is no need to be so careful in my behaviour now.”

“That would be great.”

The stagecoach climbed the hill slowly.

Abidal Evra had a face of resolve as he stopped and opened the door leading outside.

Regis came out from the coach and the gaze of the empire first army fell on him.

Before Regis was a group of well equipped and tough soldiers.

Normally, the troops standing in the first row are taller, and the weaker soldiers could be seen behind them. But that wasn’t so here, all the soldiers were top notch in built, appearance and equipment, a confident bunch.

“...”

“How is it?”

Altina who alighted next asked.

“... The first army have 3 band of 1000 cavalry, a total of 3000. Adding in the 7000 infantry, they would number 10,000. From their appearance, this should be the ‘white wolf band’.”

“So it’s 11 against 1000, 1 against roughly 90?”

“... We won’t be fighting right? And you counted me in? I couldn’t do it.”

“I counted myself twice.”

“How mean…”

“Coming.”

Altina muttered.

A man wearing red armor on a white horse came over from the band of knights.

He had magnificent golden hair.

His face gave a feeling of beauty and sharpness.

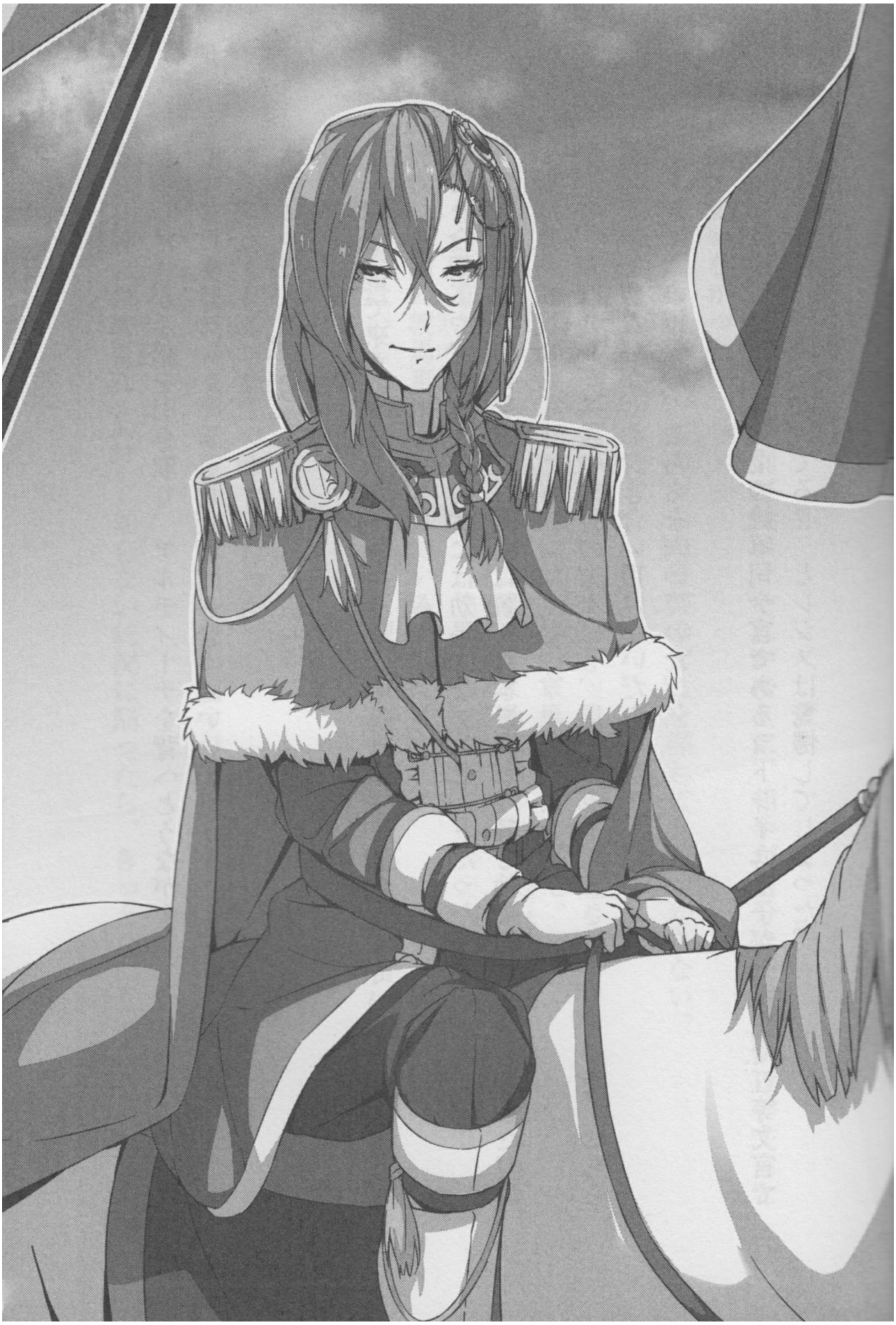
He also had crimson eyes that seemed to be burning.

The sword on his waist was the founding emperor’s sword ‘Arme Victoire Volonte’, with jewels encrusted on the hilt. The grip had also been dyed red.

That’s right…

He was the 2nd prince of the Belgarian empire, Allen Deux Latreille de Belgaria.

He rode to the group alone.



And some distance away, he alighted from his horse.

Altina’s body turned stiff, she might have drawn her sword if she had one.

Regis couldn’t do anything about it, same for the others in the group. They didn’t think the prince would come over by himself.

The clanking of the armor drew closer step by step.

Altina gritted her teeth, not allowing that man to see her fear.

Gradually, both parties were close enough to shake hands.

Latreille spread his arms, hugged Altina and said:

“I am really sorry… sister.”

“Ah? Eh?!”

The hugged Altina was stiff and couldn’t say anything.

Latreille continued in a sincere tone:

“It must have been hard on you, because your brother who controlled the entire military was incompetent., forgive me.”

“... Erm… Latreille?”

“When I heard that Argentina was taking a stagecoach to the capital, my heart ached. Was your life there so hard?”

“Huh? No, this is to be the same as the citizens--...”

“Ah, I have mountains of things to chat with you. But we should take care of our subordinates for now, hurry back to the capital and have a good rest.”

“Eh, hmm.”

“To celebrate your victory, I had prepared a horse for you, Argentina.”

“Horse?”

Latreille gestured with his eyes, and a soldier from the cavalry brought a horse over.

The brown fur was bright and neatly groomed. It had a beautiful appearance, long golden tail and the tip of its hooves were white.

A beautiful military horse.

Latreille pulled the reins over, gesturing for Altina to give it a try.

“Oh, it has a good temperament. A great horse that gets along with you.”

“Ah, yes, it is really good.”

Regis who was watching this scene was stunned.

“... I get it.”

-- A soft approach, and he had a good idea of Altina’s personality, so he was confident of this tactic. What a capable brother.

He seemed to know that no matter how precious the jewelry he could gift her, it wouldn’t move Altina.

Regis searched through the bookshelves in his mind, trying to find the best solution for this from all the books he had read.

“Ugh, what should I--”

“Hmm, if you want to travel with your strategist, you could either ride a horse or take a carriage, it’s great to have company right?”

Latreille’s gaze shifted over this side.

“Huh?!”

-- I didn’t imagine that the commander in chief who was also a royalty, prince Latreille will speak up for me, a 5th grade admin officer. Regis was really surprised.

Miscalculated.

Regis felt he had totally miscalculated, for the adversary to be aware of him.

Such a scenario doesn’t exist in the bookshelves in his mind.

Apart from nodding, Regis didn’t have any other choice.

“... I am very grateful.”

Eric and Abidal Evra had top grade military horse as their mounts.

Regis and Clarisse sat in an elegant carriage decorated with Emerald.

The luggage was stowed in a wagon.

Because they weren’t informed in advance, Regis and company apologized to the stagecoach driver and bid farewell to the stiff seats they used for 6 days.

-- they were set up.

They were going along at Latreille’s pace.

Regis recalled the words he said to Altina.

“I am a mere academic, if I get in a situation where I know nothing about, I can’t do anything.”

Eh, to think his words really came true.

Prince Latreille’s military and political capability were clear to see. Indeed, he has the ability to become the next emperor. What they were seeing was just the tip of the iceberg. So, what should we do?

The emerald carriage could seat 4, with 2 rows.

An orange haired soldier was seated in the back row.

His eyes had a gentle feel about it, he was about Latreille’s age.

From his uniform decorated in gold and silver, this man should be an aristocrat, and holding a high position.

After Regis opened the door, the man smiled and said:

“It must have been hard on you. Strategist Regis right, my name is Germain Laurentis de Beaumarchais, 1st class admin officer. Please call me Germain.”

“Ah… Thank you… My name is Regis Auric, 5th grade admin officer, may I know if I came to the wrong carriage?”

“No, this is the right one. On the short trip to the capital, please allow me to travel with you.”

“Well…”

Regis turned back to look at Clarisse.

If you ride a carriage seated next to a noble who was your political adversary, it would affect the quality of your rest.

But Clarisse didn’t change her expression as she said:

“Please don’t mind me, if the carriage doesn’t have a spot for me, I am fine with walking to the capital.”

“No way! If that really happens, I can’t imagine how the princess would punish me.”

“I would be lectured by prince Latreille too. Please, have the seat at the end.”

“... Alright, thanks for your kindness.”

On the invitation of Regis and Germain, Clarisse bowed and got up the carriage.

Clarisse sat in the inner seat while Regis took the seat by the door beside her.

Germain sat on the seat opposite them.

Normally, the maid Clarisse should be seated at the last row, while Germain takes the seat to the front.

Both Latreille’s attitude in welcoming Altina and the way Regis and the others were treated made Regis impressed by Latreille.

Germain smiled warmly and started chatting with Regis and Clarisse.

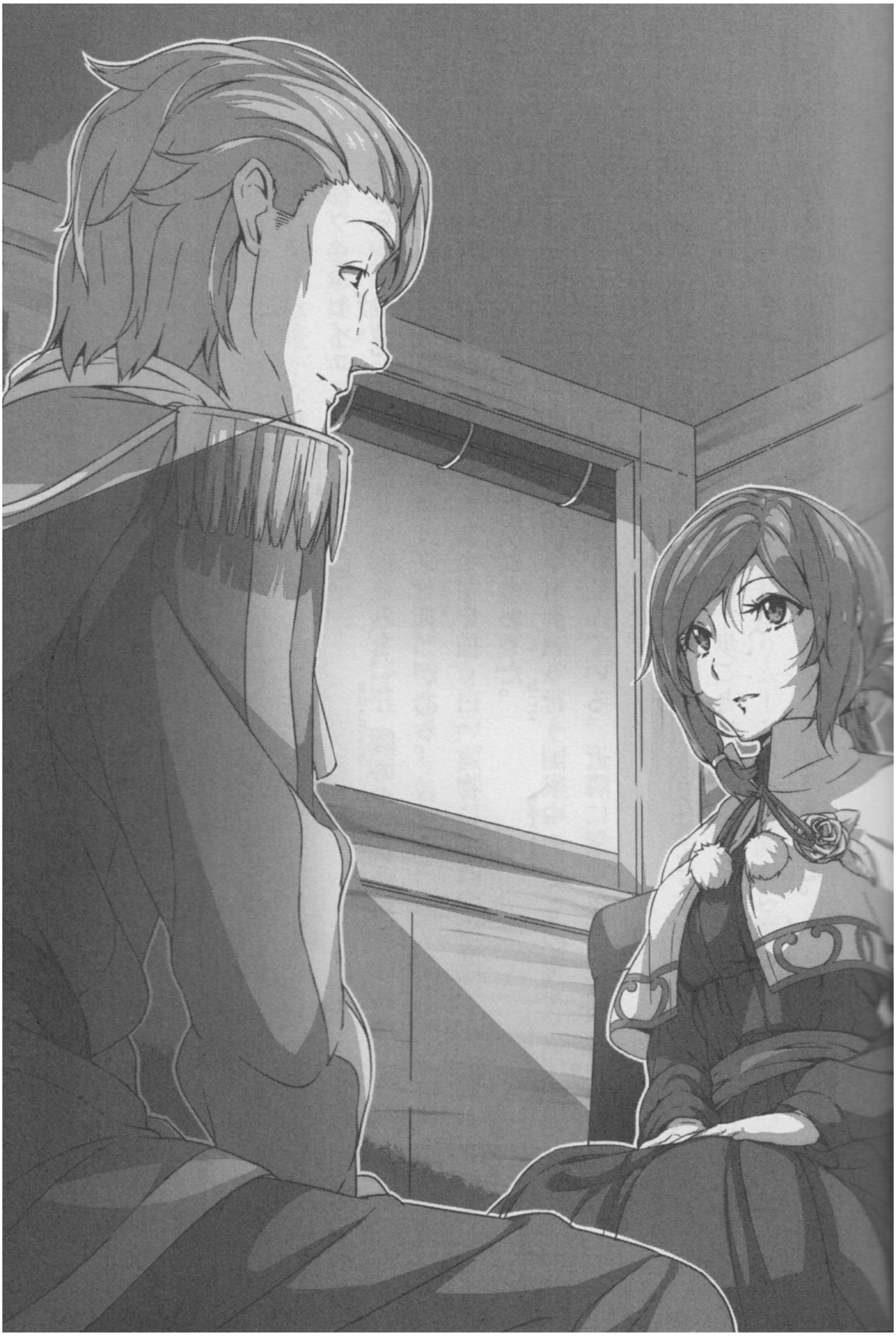
“I have wanted to meet Sir Regis for a long time.”

“... Erm, I am just a commoner and a 5th grade admin officer… So wouldn’t saying that be inappropriate?”

“Ahh, I misspoke. I am actually the 3rd son of a Marquis, my two excellent elder brothers are the ones liaising with others, so I have gotten used to this manner of speech.”

“Are your brothers doing well?”

“Yes, they are working in the west right now.”



“That means…”

Regis thought about the names of the commanders in the imperial army.

The garrison unit in the west is currently the 2nd army, the commander and vice commander are the brothers of the Beaumarchais Marquis clan.

So the 3rd son was working as the advisor for Latreille, Regis didn’t know that.

Germain smiled awkwardly.

“The Beaumarchais are a family of military lineage. I am not proficient with the sword and concentrated on studying books, I never thought I would ever be a soldier. But the prince thought highly of me while I was in military school, so I am working for him as an advisor right now.”

“Ah, I see.”

Regis thought the 3rd son of a Marquis family would be completely different from a commoner like him. But they had some similarities, so Regis felt he was a kindred spirit.

“I heard that Sir Regis is a great scholar.”

“Eh? No… nothing great to speak of, reading just happened to be my only hobby.”

“I can understand that. What books have you been reading?”

“It’s a shame, but I was too busy lately… I only read Yorgel’s ‘The Ponytail’s Next Door.”

Germain’s head tilted slightly.

“Hmm…? Is that an academic book?”

“Huh? Ah, no, this is just a fantasy novel.”

This was a love novel he bought when Regis was still in the capital. Back then, he was holding a carefree position, someone who wanted to learn a little of everything.

Germain laughed when he heard that.

"Huh? Hahaha! As expected of Sir Regis, even your jokes are extraordinary."

"Eh?"

"Advisors like us should use our intelligence to accomplish things for our lords. Comparatively, we have no time for such useless leisure."

"Ugh…"

"'I've always thought that those things should disappear."

"... What did you say?"

"Isn't that so? Those books are published to satisfy the lowly desires of others, they are the reason behind the drop in aesthetic quality of Belgaria. Shouldn't these low class literature be burned?"

Germain said in a sincere tone.

He was probably serious, wanting to destroy these books for the nation.

When Regis thought about that, he rested his tightly clenched fist on his knees.

"... Who are the ones who decide which books are high or low class?"

"The ministry of justice of course. The empire had issued warrants of arrest of 'suspected treason' for those who authored books that criticized the empire. The band of knights are sent to arrest them."

"... Are the values of those in the ministry of justice absolute? Taking into account the authority of the ministry of justice, plenty of books would not be allowed to be published."

"That is to be expected! How could criticism against the country be right!"

"How stupid… What if this kingdom is progressing in the wrong direction, is it illegal to point out the right way? Sir Germain graduated from military school, haven't you heard that 'ignoring the suggestion of subordinates is the folly of the commanders'?.. Would everything in the empire be run by foolish commanders?”

“Ah, no, well, books related to politics and science wouldn’t be destroyed, just the books used for leisure.”

“... How would the criteria for the books be set? Have you thought about this question?... Putting that aside, even if a book was created for leisure, it is still for the hardworking citizens of the empire.”

“Even so, there are some who commit crimes because they read such books.”

“Then tell me, how many people have committed crimes because they read these books?”

Germain became silent.

Regis slowly unclenched his fist.

-- Not good.

He became agitated unknowingly.

If you consider Altina’s position, now should be the time to get on the good side of Latreille.

What should be done to maintain their own political stance while catering to the other party?

Something unexpected happened. Clarisse who was seated in the innermost position was the first to break the heavy silence.

Clarisse was expressionless as usual.

“... I don’t understand these complicated things… But since we are living in this world, we have to live our entire lives as humans. If we were to die someday… I wouldn’t regret my life if my heart is filled with the wonderful things of this world. That’s how I feel.”

After finishing, silence encompassed the carriage.

Regis stopped keeping up appearances.

He didn’t apologize to Germain for his earlier words too.

Germain smiled faintly.

“Oh, that was rude of me, to discuss such a complicated topic before a lady. Political and clan topics are taboo even in a party. Eh, I was acting like an uncivilized buffoon.”

“... No, I was ill mannered.”

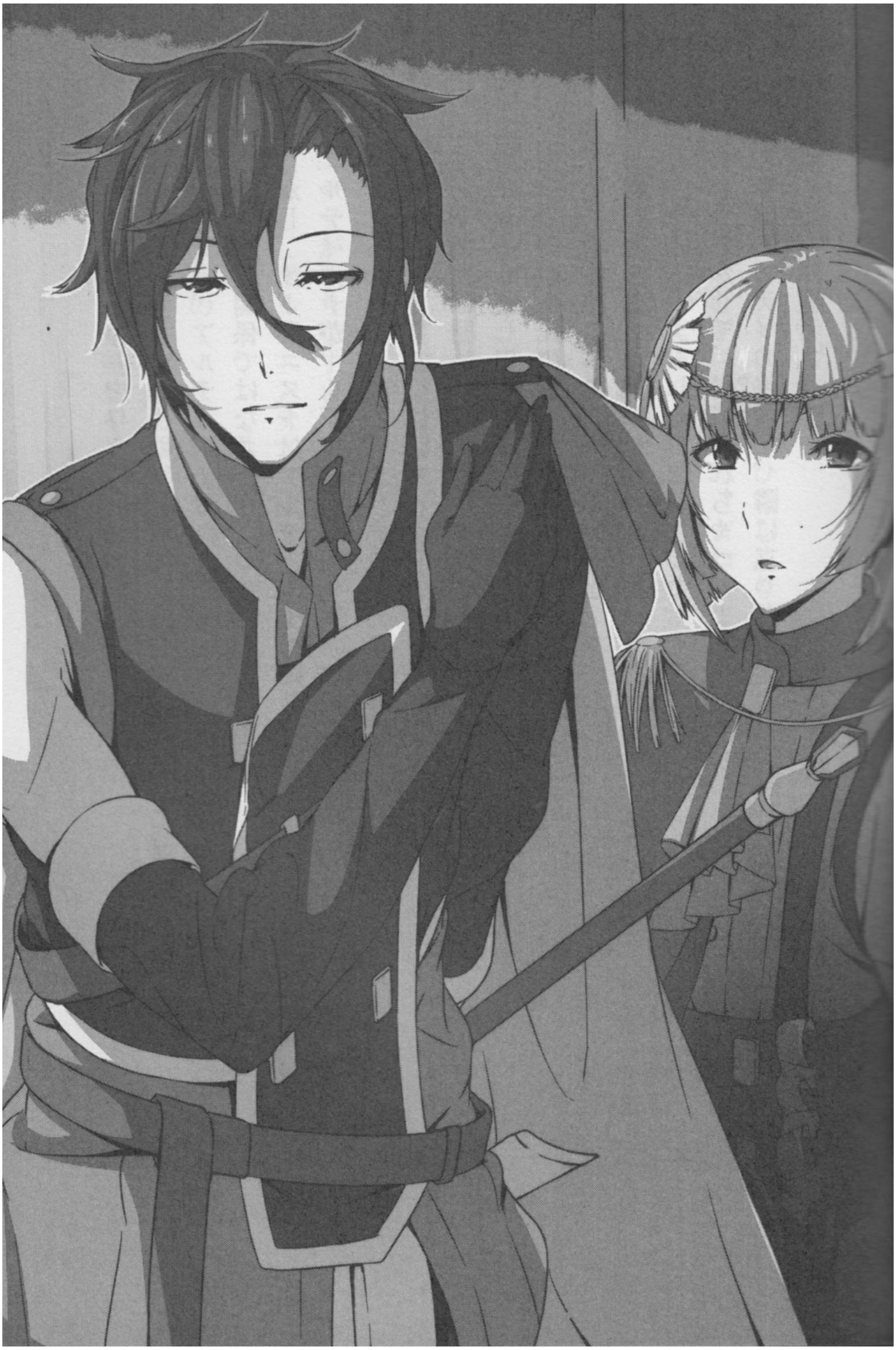
The atmosphere in the carriage returned to normal and Germain shifted his gaze outside.

“We are almost at the capital.”

“That’s right.”

Regis looked at Clarisse and could see nostalgia from her eyes.

Chapter 2 - Duel under the Moon



The imperial Capital Versailles was a city without walls.

Positioned at a slightly elevated basin were vast and beautiful streets. Looking down from the top of the hill, one could see the entire beautiful scenery unobstructed.

At the heart of the city was the Imperial Palace Le Brane.

From the top view, the simple palace layout was portrayed by a large cross with well organised pathways, dividing it into four corners with four small courtyards to the North, South, East and West and a garden in the middle.

The palace was not only the residence for royalty, but was also the headquarters where military and domestic affairs were handled.

Surrounding the palace were the private estates of the nobles, regardless of those holding territories nearby or those situated far away.

As there were no walls or gates to separate the district, sentries could be seen everywhere. If any commoners were to be within 10 steps of the boundaries, they would be restrained by the armed guards and questioned.

On the road way in front of the palace, the Knights of the White Wolves were slowly advancing along a street.

The streets were filled with people.

The capital was filled with a festivity as tomorrow would be the Empire’s anniversary since its founding. The festival started since morning as stores were set up along the streets

Nevertheless, there were way too many people.

Regis looked around.

“…Why are there so many people?”

“They gathered because they wanted to have a glimpse of Princess Marie Quatre, some also gathered to look at Latreille. After all, today is a special day.”

“Yes, as the princess left the capital last year on this date.”

“While that is true, the main reason is because the young princess took the famous impregnable Volk Fortress, which obviously piqued the people’s interests.”

“Ahhh… I see.”

In the capital, there were many wealthy families, but the number of people that came due to admiration of the royalty or nobles were not in the minority.

With the young and beautiful princess becoming a hero, it was not strange that people gathered.

Seeing the situation, Regis understood why Latreille would want to pull Altina to his side.

Regis stuck his head out the window, looking at Altina who was in front.

Altina who was slowly advancing while riding the horse kept a straight face as she was surrounded by supporters of her political enemies.

Due to this, the people could feel a majestic aura around her.

However, along the way, there were some children that kept shouting “Princess Marie Quatre” while waving their hands.

Regis was afraid that Altina would display her displeasure openly or make unpleasant remarks, but that fear appeared to be unwarranted.

As the civilians gathered, the atmosphere increased in tension.

All of a sudden, Altina who was keeping a straight face smiled and waved to the civilians.

Seeing this, the crowd started cheering.

“Long live Marie Quatre!”

“Vive l’empereur!”

Someone started playing music and the crowd began singing songs praising the Empire.

Seeing Altina’s smile, Regis felt that this was the first time seeing her like this.

As they traveled, a feminine voice reached Regis’ ears.

“Regis?!”

“Eh?!”

Regis turned back and looked

Although the carriage was advancing slowly, but he was still able to feel the speed, Regis turned back and looked at the crowd

Among the people, he saw a familiar woman.

Although he wanted to call out her name,

But the carriage already moved on, causing Regis to miss her.

There was no helping it, Regis turned and looked behind.

-- It has been so long since we last saw each other, you look great, Carol.

At this point of time, Regis felt that he had really returned to the capital.

The magnificent gate was opened, allowing the carriage to advance into the palace Le Brane

The Knights of the White Wolves that followed the carriage did not pass through the gate.

Similarly, Abidal Evra and the rest that travelled together from Volk fortress stopped at the gate. Eric was the only guard that accompanied Altina in.

The carriage slowly advanced to the palace’s square and stopped there.

On Latreille’s side, Latreille, Germain and the knights totaled to 6, while on Altina’s side, there were 4 people, Regis, Altina, Clarisse and Eric.

This was the first time Regis saw the inside of the palace. He felt it was a wondrous place and looked around him.

The cream coloured tiles of the square were engraved with exquisite details.

The details of the tiles were actually Imperial Guards holding muskets using a single hand.

Regis had only heard of them in stories; this was the first time he actually saw them.

“...How incredible…”

“Haa~ He finally arrived.”

Altina, who was born and raised here, was more relaxed than when she was surrounded by people.

Putting aside Altina’s attire, just the way she dismounted was enough to even cause the horse to shudder.

“I should be thanking you, Latreille… Be it the horse or the welcoming.”

“Indeed, if you were still riding the stagecoach, it might be impossible to advance under the eyes of the public, we might even be a laughing stock and be infamous for such reason.”

Latreille then dismounted from his horse.

“Well, I am happy that you are satisfied with this.”

“However—“

Altina glared at Latrille.

“—I don’t trust you.”

“Oh, is that so? Guess there is no helping to it, although I did some things, I know that a horse is not enough as a compensation. Then, I will see you later during dinner.”

Latreille was waving and displayed a lonely smile while moving towards the stairs, when he turned his head back, he revealed a look of contempt.

“There is definitely something wrong.”

“…Are you alright, Your Highness?”

“Those eyes, he is definitely up to something.”

“That’s apparent, he can stand against strong political enemies, so the way he acts is normal.”

“Be more courageous, Regis, you absolutely need to do something.”

“Starting tomorrow is the 3 day long Empire’s founding Anniversary, if nothing happens during this period of time, my role will be just enjoying these 3 days.”

"Why does it look as though you have found a frog in my bag?"

“...If there’s really a frog, I hope it’s alive.”

The palace’s staff appeared and proceeded to remove the luggage from the carriage.

Finally, they could take a break.

Altina, who was given the cold shoulder in the palace, went to her room to rest after preparing.

Following Altina who passed through the entrance was Clarisse, even Eric, as expected of Blanchard’s son, had a honest look.

Yet Regis felt as though he was not supposed to be here, carefully following behind.

The palace was like an art museum as there were many art pieces, even the palace itself looked like an art piece. Moreover, there were many scenes which appeared only in stories that could be seen here.

--Oh~ Was this not the pillar that “Love Thief of the Imperial Court” described? That corridor *should be where the “one-to-one fight”* *mentioned in the “Legend of the hero Alfred” happened.*

“...How wondrous… Could this be paradise?”

Inside the palace, other than some staffs, the majority were nobles.

The nobles raised their brow when they saw Altina.

Altina thought that the nobles would say something unpleasant to her, but it seems that no one dared to do so.

What made them speechless was not just the Grand Tonnerre Quatre, which Altina was carrying without any trouble.

Rather, not only was this princess rumoured to have defeated the hero Jerome, she had also pacified the barbarians and captured the impregnable fortress. She was the commander that accomplished these impossible feats.

Aside from all of these rumors...

The nobles in the imperial capital recognised that they were not able to look down on the soldiers.

“Looks like there is another thing to thank Latreille for.”

“What happened, Your Highness?”

“After I joined the military, the palace became quieter.”

“I see.”

However, this caused the malicious thoughts directed at her to increase.

Even without any words, Regis could tell that the nobles looked at them as if they were demons. Regis stretched his back a little and thought..

--So this was the environment that Altina grew up in.

When he first heard of this from Altina, Regis thought it was unbelievable. However, after seeing this, he understood what Altina meant.

As royalty, Altina was unsatisfied about the Belgaria's current system. Being concerned about the people was a good thing, but did this feeling only come about because of her mother was a commoner? Regis could not help but think of this from time to time.

But now, Regis understood what Altina thought.

This sentiment that the nobles bear towards the civilians- strong and blatant, unreasonable, insulting, and hatred, was the best reflection of what the nobles currently were today.

"Don't they feel that something is wrong?" While harboring this feeling, Altina began doubting the nobility system. She also showed an interest in politics and began sympathising with the civilians that had suffered. This must be how Altina's goal was formed, Regis thought.

Noticing something weird with Regis, Altina asked,

"Did you see anything interesting?"

"... … Eh, erm… So this was where the Princess grew up."

"Yes."

"... If I asked around in the palace, perhaps I might find out things related to the princess."

Altina suddenly blushed.

"What are you talking about, really… but this is fine too."

"Eh?"

Suddenly, she whispered into the ears of Regis

"That… I, I should introduce you to my father."

"Calm down, Altina. Although I don't understand, but if I, a civilian, accidentally offend the Emperor, I could be dismissed."

Regis' voice was only loud enough for Altina to hear.

Altina’s room was located at the centre of the north side.

The room beside Altina was supposed to be Clarisse’s room...

“It will be inconvenient if the distance is too far, Regis and Eric, you shall stay in the room next to this. Clarisse, you don’t mind staying in my room right?”

“As you wish, Your Highness.”

“As your bodyguard, I am very thankful for this decision of yours.”

Eric also approved of this idea.

During the trip, Regis and Eric were sleeping together with Abidal Evra. If they were to share a room, there was no need to worry about a lack of blanket, hence they had no reason to object.

The sky was still bright when Altina and the rest reached the house--

Regis and the rest arrived at the dining room, the staff then told them that they were preparing their meals.

However, Altina suggested going to the streets.

“Let’s go and take a look at the steam locomotive!”

While Regis and Eric were out, Clarisse used the time to clean the room that had not been used for a long time.

Altina used a cloth to cover her hair and went out.

This year, the Belgaria Empire was constructing their first railway. The steam locomotive was from High Britannia, the rail started from the capital to the nearby Sanc Juhel city, a short distance as a preliminary trial.

High Britannia was a nation ruled by a Queen. In the past, it was famous for its tea and culture. In recent years, they have begun focusing on technological advancement

With the large purchase of tea leaves, the two countries cooperated in developing new technologies that came from the east.

High Britannia, a nation far smaller than Belgaria, sounded the warning bells of the wise residing within the empire.

In order to learn more about technological advancement, scholars from Belgaria have been going to High Britannia as exchange students. Even so, was it possible to even catch up?

Regis also felt that one must be wary of High Britannia, this feeling intensified after they saw the steam locomotive.

Altina had an innocent look as usual.

“How wonderful, Regis, this huge black locomotive makes such a loud sound!”

“... Really”

“I want to try riding it once.”

“...Maybe next time, after you return, you can sit for as many trips as you want.”

This never-seen before locomotive made the anniversary an unprecedented one.

After this, Regis went to the bookshop he used to patronise and greeted the shop owner Carol.

Later that evening, Regis and the rest went to dine at the La Taverne which Regis frequented in the past. However, the place was actually where politics were heavily discussed.

Entrepreneurs, teachers, scholars gathered here to discuss recent news.

“The national reserves have gone beyond the bottom line, let’s not talk about the money required to conduct the marriage for the 6th concubines! Before that was the birthday party of a concubine and there is still the anniversary tomorrow, what a waste of money.”

“The tax dollars of the commoners are used to pay for the banquets of the nobles! How can we allow this!?!?”

“This should be a nation free and equal for all!”

The energetic youth yelled as he brandished his fist.

Seeing this, it took all of Regis and the rest effort to just stand at the shop's entrance. Altina, who was using a cloth to cover her hair, revealed a look of unease.

It would be troublesome if Altina's identity was to be revealed here.

"Although there's a nice shop ahead… I think it's better to eat at the palace."

Regis told Altina and Eric to return to the palace.

As the sun slowly set, they returned to the palace.

At the Northeast of the palace, the scene in which the staff preparing for dinner and the banquet tomorrow were as if it was a battlefield.

Even though the guards at the door saw the robed Altina, they did not stop them as Regis and Eric were wearing their military uniform.

Leaving the rowdy streets, they passed by the courtyard and the patio as they advanced towards the hall.

Soon, they reached a house in the northern side.

The beautiful bed frame, the artistic carvings on the wall and the chandelier with jewel like accessory hanging off it.

Seeing this impressed them.

Even if this room was the most modest room in the palace.

Altina removed the robe, revealing the dress underneath and her hair that was covered by the cloth. Even with her attire earlier, the guards would not have stopped her.

Walking out of the corridor filled with artworks, they headed towards the centre of the palace.

"My apologies, Your Highness, because of me showing you around, things became this way…"

"It's fine, this often happens when I go outside. Eric, you should more or less be used to it.”

“O,of course. Still, I’m a bit nervous.”

Remembering about the scene earlier, Eric could not help but shiver.

“Eh? That is?...”

Looking in front of the corridor, Altina’s hand reached to her waist, but there was nothing there.

The Grand Tonnerre Quatre was too huge, so a long sword was usually equipped instead. However, it would be too striking if she wore it to the streets, hence Altina did not have anything with her.

Seeing Altina stop her action, Eric gripped the hilt of his sword, stepping forward to cover Regis and Altina with his body.

“Eh? That guy is?...”

Approaching from the other side was a silver-haired male.

His body was slender enough to make people feel that he was a woman.

His height was about the same as Regis.

He wore a sewed military uniform without any decorative medals, with him was a decent long sword with a jewel at its hilt.

Altina shouted,

“Auguste!”

Hearing his name, the black-haired youth beside the silver-haired youth reacted first.

“Isn’t this princess Argentina?”

“Ah, Eddie is there too? It’s fine if you call me like you used to.”

“That will be great, I’m not used to formal conversations.”

Wearing a full black military uniform, at the waist was a red longsword with Eddie’s full name engraved on the hilt. Thus, Regis knew who he was.

-- Duke Eddie Fabio de Balzac

The Balzac house was known for its swordsmanship, the first generation family head was the Flame Emperor’s right-hand man. As proof of his prestige, one of the seven sword was bestowed to the clan.

There was no mistake, the sword at his waist was the Defendre Sept.

His grandfather Baltasar was Altina’s mentor in swordsmanship. Eddie wanted to ease the mood, but he could not change the fact that the two were political enemies.

Even knowing that Altina and Auguste were political enemies, for what reason did Eddie and Auguste have to be moving together.

Altina put her hand on Regis’ shoulder and said,

“Let me introduce, this is Regis, my strategist.”

“Ah… Nice to meet you, I’m Regis Auric, 5th grade admin officer.”

“Ahhh, I have heard of you! Nice to meet you, Regis, you can call me Eddie.”

Finishing his words, he stretched his hand out for a handshake.

-- A duke and a civilian shaking hand?

There was a rumour that the Duke was easygoing, seems like it was the true.

Hence, they shook hands. Their clasped hands trembled for a bit.

“... Pleased to meet you.”

“Ah, don’t tell me that you are wary of me?”

The silver-haired male elbowed Eddie lightly.

“Of course, stupid.”

“Alright, I’m sorry.”

“Altina… It’s been awhile.”

“Erm, are you Auguste?”

“Of course I am.”

The first prince, Carlos liam Auguste de Belgaria, replied unhappily.

Altina did not show any remorse at all.

“Haven't you become smaller?”

“H,how is that even possible! How unreasonable.”

“Also, your voice seems higher pitched.”

“Argh?!”

Eddie answered this for Auguste.

“That, Argentina… After Auguste had fallen sick, a lot of things happened.”

“Ah, is that so? Never mind, I will ask him next time, but why are you together with him?”

Altina pointed at Eddie’s chest with her finger and said.

Eddie averted his eyes uncomfortably.

“I’m currently working as Auguste’s guard, do you not know?”

“Never heard of this.”

This was also the first time Regis heard of it too. There was a lack of information as they were at the borders, however news regarding the burning of the estate did reach them.

“... That reminds me, you got attacked by bandits?”

Regis asked and changed the topic.

Auguste replied without any hesitation,

“Nn, those guys were hired by Latreille. The mastermind was Major general Baudouin, but unfortunately, no evidence was found.”

Eddie was stunned when Auguste said that with confidence.

It seemed that the news was true.

Eddie revealed an intrigued face and said.

“Latreille too, stirring up so much trouble really worries me. Don’t worry though, I never once thought of sending an assassin after you, Argentina.”

“I feel that this would not happen as long as we are in the palace, so don’t worry about it. Instead, Eddie, are you able to strike someone down? Have you overcome your fear of blood?”

“Ahh, that, no, killing someone isn’t my forte… Isn’t it the same for you too, Argentina?”

“I, I will do it if it’s necessary.”

Regis observed the surrounding.

The nobles that passed by have a curious look as they looked here.

On one hand was the shut-in Auguste, and on other side was Altina who came back from the borders. The conversation between the two was a strange sight to them.

If such extreme words were to be used, it could be troublesome. If someone used the words that Auguste said against him, things could get ugly.

“Your Highness… Dinner is almost ready.”

“Nn, indeed, I shall excuse myself first then.”

Altina was also aware of the situation.

“Elder brother, see you later during dinner.”

“Nn, be careful.”

Auguste nodded his head.

The two sides walked pass each other.

Eric looked at the back of Auguste for awhile before he chased after Regis and Altina.

“My apologies.”

“...Did anything happen?”

“Ah, no, just… Nothing at all.”

Altina then went for dinner.

As the banquet has not started yet, the nobles were still wearing their usual outfit, which was a flowing robe with a sash tied at the waist.

Regis, Clarisse and Eric’s dinner was brought into the room by the staff, they were intending to finish their meal before Altina came back.

Regis was stunned as even the appetizers that were served was deluxe meat.

“This… It’s okay to eat this, right?”

“Regis aside, you are a noble, Eric, why are you saying that?”

Was what Clarisse replied.

Hm? Regis felt that Clarisse’s mood had changed.

When there were others around, Clarisse tends to stay silent...

Perhaps due to working together for quite some time, Clarisse seemed to have opened up to Eric.

Eric, who had been admonished, went red in the face

“The Blanchard Baron house holds little power in the palace.”

“... As the princess’ subordinate, how can you act like this? For people with lower status, they won’t be served such deluxe dishes.”

Speaking of which, these dishes were obviously fine cuisines.

As marine technologies advanced in recent years, pepper which was a luxury good was generously used.

After that, they silently enjoyed their meal.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door.

“Who is there? Don’t tell me that there is still more?”

At the same time as Regis was speaking, Clarisse went to open the door, while Eric grasped the hilt of his sword.

Altina rushed in after the door was opened.

“Regis!”

“Eh, Your Highness?!”

“It’s fine if you address me as always!”

Regis almost fell off his chair as Altina lightly bumped his shoulder.

Altina then proceeded to sit on the empty part of the seat.

And so, Regis and Altina was sharing one chair.

“Y, yes?”

“Ah~ What, you don’t like it?”

“Erm, let’s not do this… … Your Highness”

“Isn’t it fine! Didn’t you do it with Eric too? So why can’t you do it with me??”

Eric was confused when his name was mentioned. He did nothing wrong, so there must be some reason for this.

It seems that trying to hide his relation with Altina was impossible.

“Ha… That… The fact is, Eric, I’ll be troubled if you were to misunderstand…”

“I’m not used to formal conversation! Hence you should call me as usual, Regis.”

“... It will affect the morale of the army if rumours of this spreads, hence there is a need to be formal. It is also my duty as a strategist to be formal when speaking to Your Highness.”

“Really! I order you to address me like before~!~!”

“Argh… That… Al,Altina.”

“Ehehe”

Altina’s face blushed in an instant.

Eric’s expression instantly changed and revealed a shocked look.

“Th,that means… Regis and the princess… So this is what they call love that transcends social status.”

“It’s not that.”

Regis replied without any hesitation, Altina then slowly squeezed Regis out of the chair with her butt.

“... What’s wrong, Altina?”

“I feel that the chair is very comfortable, why don’t you go sit at the balcony and enjoy the cooling wind instead?”

“... If possible, I will like to finish my meal in the house. The weather is still cold, I’m not interested in noble-like hobbies.”

Why did she suddenly get angry? Regis racked his brain for the reason.

Regis had no choice but to find another chair to sit.

Clarisse proceeded to clear the utensils used by Regis and prepared a new set of utensils for Altina.

“Your Highness, this is inevitable as we are talking about Regis here”

“You’re right! Really, all because of Regis!”

“...Erm, did I do anything wrong?...”

Eric was secretly laughing at one side. His expression was different from before as if he saw hell, now his face showed a genuine smile.

“This feels like a siblings’ relationship, I’m relieved.”

“The relation between Altina and I can only be that of a Commander and strategist… In any case, it will be troublesome if rumours were to spread, so I hope you can keep this a secret.”

“Nn, I understand. I swear it on my honor.”

Eric drawn his sword as he said that, and sheathe it afterwards. This was a knight’s oath.

“Thanks-- Back to the topic, Altina, why are you back so fast? You did not have dinner?”

It was supposed to be a reunion dinner for the royalty.

“That’s right! Listen to me, Regis!”

“Did you hear any news?”

“Father married another concubine!!”

“... Seems like the wedding ceremony was when we were sieging Volk fortress… I heard that the 6th concubine is just 15 year old.”

It meant that the 6th concubine, disregarding the First prince and Second prince, was younger than the Third Prince Bastian and was about the same age as Altina.

Wives that were younger than sons were common among nobility and royalty.

“That 6th concubine was sitting right beside Father during dinner! She is acting as if she is the main wife.”

“Th,this is troublesome… That, the 6th concubine is a princess from Estaburg, which means she is the princess of the neighbouring country. With status like that, she may be more conceited than the noble’s daughter.”

“Rumours that the new concubine is very cold towards others! The relation between the Queen and her doesn’t seems good.”

“This really seems serious…”

“That’s why! Before the aperitif, I came out with an excuse of wanting to drink juice, thus sneaking out.”

“How unsociable!”

“Nonono! I absolutely will not return to there, I don’t want to witness that situation.”

“... Can’t help it… However, you must attend the banquet tomorrow.”

“No~!”

“... Altina, Abidal Evra and the rest finished their job as your guards. Now, you should also do your duty.”

“Ah,nn, I understand, I was only joking just now… I will be responsible for my things till the end, but not today!”

“... The show starts tomorrow, so rest well for tonight. After all, the long trip has taken a toll on the body.”

“That’s right.”

Altina reached for the utensils.

“Ha~, I don’t know why but I feel hungry after feeling relieved. Ah~ The food looks tasty.”

“... Let’s eat together then.”

Clarisse and Eric nodded in agreement with Regis.

After dinner, Altina and Clarisse returned to their room.

Although it was still too early to sleep, but they felt tired after the long journey.

After some time--

Someone knocked the door.

Seems like there were many guests tonight.

This time. it was Eric that went to open the door.

“May I ask who is it?”

“I’m Clarisse, the tea is ready.”

“Ahh, pardon me.”

Eric opened the door, allowing Clarisse in. Clarisse then put the tea on the table.

Regis was reading in sleepwear. When he saw Clarisse bring the tea to him, he nodded his head to thank her.

“Thank you, Clarisse, I happened to feel thirsty.”

“You’re welcome, tea tastes better when everyone is around.”

“I see… Where’s Altina? Will she be coming later or has she gone to sleep?”

“Her Highness isn’t in the room.”

“Eh? What happened?”

“Just now, Latreille sent a message to Altina. After reading it, she went out in a rush after tidying up her clothes.”

“...What?!?!”

“D,do you know where she went?”

Not just Regis, even Eric was appalled after hearing this.

“She wore outerwear, so I suppose she went to the palace.”

“Why did you..!!

The agitated Eric swallowed the words that almost came out.

Clarisse was neither an adjutant nor a guard, but just a maid. Yet she told her master’s secret to others. This should be a disgrace as a maid, but she still came here.

Regis put down his book on the table and stood up.

“Thank you, Clarisse.”

“There’s no need for thanks, the princess didn’t say that I couldn’t tell others about it.”

Originally, one should have kept quiet about it, Clarisse was just using an excuse to tell us.

Eric walked towards the door after listening.

“In any case, I shall go ahead and check first.”

His strong sense of responsibility made him show a determined face.

“Calm down, Eric. Although finding Altina is important, but you can’t be reckless in the palace. If you cause trouble here, the Princess’ standing will be affected.”

“Ah… I understand.”

He tidied his clothes and went out after saluting.

Regis also quickly changed into his military uniform.

Although there was a female in the room, but he didn’t have the luxury to care about it during such a situation.

“... Did Altina bring her sword along?”

“Yes.”

“If that’s the case, she should stand out… Unless she went somewhere before people noticed her... and that place is deserted.”

“Do you know such a place, Regis?”

"... Well, out of the many records of events in the palace, one of them deviated widely from the actual layout of the place and was widely criticised. There were many details of the palace written in books, authored by nobles who visited the palace numerous times”

“I’m very troubled now…”

“I roughly have an idea what is happening. Be at ease, You didn't betray Altina. She didn’t stop you from telling others.”

“I’m actually very worried.”

“... That’s true, despite Latreille acting as a gentleman, Altina could be in danger without any guards.”

“No, there is no need to worry about the princess.”

“Huh?”

“I’m worried that she won’t be able to protect you if you went to search for her.”

“...Ah, erm, it should be fine if I shout for help.”

“That’s right, in that case, the princess will able to go save you.”

“Ha,haha… I’m relieved.”

Due to Regis panicking, his mind was not working. However, thanks to Clarisse, he managed to calm down.

Unlike Eric who was trained, Regis would only be a burden if he panicked.

Hence, it was a must for him to calm down.

Regis searched through the bookcase in his brain.

“... A similar situation was written in “A kiss in the darkness”, written by Baron Vigeville.

“What a lewd book.”

“I,i,it isn’t what you think it is!?”

Regis just blurted out the words without realising that it was a bit shameful.

In fact, the book contained lots of tryst scenes, but the genre was of mystery.

If not for the last scene of the palace floating to the sky, it would had been a masterpiece. That was what Regis thought when he read it.

“I’m going now”

“Regis, the princess won’t lose to anyone while holding her sword. However, she is naive and innocent, so she is easily fooled. Unless the malicious thoughts are obvious, the princess will not notice.”

“... That’s true.”

“That’s why it’s fine to lie to her occasionally.”

“You?!”

“I’m joking, but someone out there might do that, so you need to protect her.”

“...Nn… Perhaps the first person to be wary of is you.”

“Hehe, I’m looking forward to it.”

“You’re really hard to handle.”

Regis exited the house after waving to Clarisse.

The palace was larger than the streets, so the chance of finding Altina was low if he searched randomly.

Latreille would select somewhere that was deserted carefully. If that is so, the entertaining literature works depicting life in the palace would be a good reference.

Regis quietly opened a small gap of the door of Prometheus room.

The layout of the palace was a number of buildings extending in all four directions, forming a shape of a cross. Altina’s room was located at the northern central while Auguste’s annex was near the front of the northern palace. The door to the outside was the common exit used in the day located at the northeast part of the palace.

The room was located at the northern part, but it faced the courtyard in the northwest.

There was a patio in courtyard, which was shaded by a forest. Hence, it was deserted during winter due to the cold temperature, only during summer would someone use it. Right now was still the chilly start of spring, people would not come here normally, hence it was the best place for the secretive meeting.

The large window of the patio was opened.

The lace curtains were swaying in the wind.

A red-haired girl wearing a green uniform and carrying a huge sword was standing there.

--As expected

Regis thanked from the bottom of his heart

--I’m very grateful to you, Baron Vigeville!! I will definitely buy your next work, even if the capital were to float into the sky! No, I’ll buy it no matter what floats into the sky.

In any case, it would be troublesome if the guards patrolling caught me eavesdropping while standing on this corridor.

Regis sneaked into the house without attracting any attention.

I am quite agile for a bookworm who reads in bed all day, Regis thought.

Regis stuck close to the wall in the dark room, straining his ears to listen to the conversation.

It would be nice if it was just idle chat...

Regis eavesdropped on the conversation between Altina and Latreille.

“Well… There’s this kind of thing too.”

“Well… Looks like you have changed.”

“In that case, you too… For example, what you just said sounds like an old man.”

“Old man??!... To become next emperor, I painstaking trained…”

“It doesn’t sounds like it! Back to the topic, what do you want to talk about using the excuse of reminiscing our past?”

“Nn, you’re about age to understand such affairs…”

“Of course, I will be fifteen soon.”

“My goal isn’t just to obtain this nation. Right now, will our nation obtain victory should a war break out? The civilians that are oppressed are about to collapse, if that happens, the war front will be affected.”

“Really?”

Altina squealed in surprise.

“Is there anything wrong?”

“For Latreille to understand the pains of the citizens, that surprised me.”

“I’m not that dumb, if I’m to just support the nobles, more and more people will want to rebel. Eventually, this nation will collapse. Although we have hundreds of thousands of soldiers, the civilians far outnumber that.”

“That’s right! The civilians’ patience are limited, we must stop the nobles’ oppression.”

“Wastage is strictly prohibited.”

Latreille nodded in agreement under the moonlight.

Altina’s face brightened upon seeing this situation.

There was nothing better than if Latreille ideals were aligned with her.

If not for that poisoning incident, Latreille will be the one closest to becoming the emperor.

“I think so too! The nobles should stop their extravagant behaviours and stop the war by protecting places that are vulnerable to attacks.”

“It’s impossible to stop the war.”

“Eh? Why?”

“Do you know how many people will be left jobless if the war stops?...It won’t be just soldiers, instructors, transportation officer, weapons makers, as well as handymen… It's necessary to maintain the scale of war in the whole empire uniformly. That's why more war fronts will be made.”

“H,how can this be!”

The agitated Altina shouted.

Latreille surveyed the surrounding.

On the night before the anniversary, the streets and the palace were filled with laughter and music, hence no one will care about this small commotion.

“Latreille, don’t you find this strange?”

“This nation’s economy and war is inseparable. If the nobles stop their extravagant behaviour now, the civilians will begin to slack. That will mean that the fund for war will be limited, but the war will not stop, do you understand?”

“But war will cause many people to die!”

“Then it’s fine to have over 300 thousand unemployed people?”

“How can this be…”

“Listen to me, Altina, our nation cannot survive for long like this. At this critical time, we need to work together. I’m not able to restraint the nobles, although I have the control of the military, I lost support of the Emperor’s vassal. Very soon, I might be replaced.”

“Father’s closest confidant? The prime minister?”

“That's right. The grand chamberlain would be next, especially those senile big nobles friends of him with no position but frequently appear on the events. My supporters said that if the emperor changes his mind, I would easily lose my position.”

“Even Father won’t do this kind of thing? Moreover, Latreille, aren’t you the Commander of the army? Who will replace you to lead the army?”

“There are many who covet my position. If they obtained the position of commander in chief, they can obtain the inheritance rights via marriage.”

“Eh? Is that so?”

“...”

Regis also knew about this.

If the royal family only bore princesses, other than being empress...

Normally, the most outstanding male was chosen -- the highest ranking in the military as their son-in-law, there were cases where they become the emperor too.

The first army commander who was not the commander in chief was chosen that time.

After that, when his son was fifteen and received the inheritance rights. Having royal lineage injected into his family with the coming of age of his son, the son-in-law ruled the nation as regent in the emperor’s stead.

No matter what, Auguste was easily sick. If that person replaces Latreille as the commander, he has a high chance of inheriting the throne.

“In the end, my authority to command the army is just that much.”

How is the authority to command an army that is in hundred thousand not enough? Regis thought… However, it was true that just commanding the army was not enough to restrain the nobles nor was it enough to change the nation.

The only one who could do this was the emperor.

Altina seemed to understand something and spoke.

“Then, who is the one to be married off? It’s… me?!”

“Of course, you are the eldest daughter of the emperor after all, Altina.”

“Argh…”

Even as the queen, with someone that was militaristic and power-hungry as emperor, it will be impossible to stop the war. In the end, the future that Altina did not want would happen.

“Auguste’s sister might be joining this game of thrones later. She has a weaker constitution than elder brother, and seems to be under medical treatment in her parent's villa.”

“Felicia? Somehow, I don't quite remember her at all, because I didn't play or associate that much with her.”

“... ...That's because by then she had the strength of a normal child. For her to play in something like riding cows would be impossible.”

“If that is the criteria, only Bastian could join this game. I can chase the “bulls” into its pen without any problem then.

Suddenly, Altina went deep in thoughts.

“Felicia… Felicia… Silver hair… It can’t be?!”

Latreille suddenly narrowed his eyes.

“This nation, if we want to change the direction it’s heading, I need to become the emperor.”

“Well, older brother, I can understand your thinking.”

“... Huh?”

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

“Ah, no, nothing at all. It’s just that it’s been very long since you last addressed me that way.”

“Hmm? Oh, are we not reminiscing the past? It became that way without me realising it. Calling you Latreille is enough, yes, Latreille is enough.”

Bleh~ Altina stuck her tongue out.

Only Altina was bold enough to have this kind of attitude towards this nation's second prince who was also the army commander.

“Ahh… The words are to be said to Princess Argentina… The situation now is different from half a year ago. There are two factions right now, one supporting Auguste while the other supporting me, do you know this?”

“To decide the new emperor with this, how is that even possible?”

“You are thinking of letting someone without support become the emperor?”

“Both side aren’t reliable anyway.”

Latreille heard that and nodded his head.

Altina seemed to not fully understand about the factions, but Regis understood it. However, he was not sure about the recent situation..

“Be it in the military or the among the nobles, there are some who are neutral. Among them, they are beginning to form the third faction that support you, just that they haven’t declared it yet.”

“Huh!?”

“Auguste is sickly while there are unflattering rumours about me… Other than those, there are no news about another faction.”

“What about Bastian?”

“About three month ago, around the new year, he went to High Britannia as an exchange student.”

“Arg… He escaped.”

“Because the fight for the inheritance can be scary. He’s afraid of being embroiled. That wild and ignorant brother, does being in a neighbouring nation that is strict on etiquette not cause him any unease?”

“I think he feels that he will be safe as long as he is not involved in the power struggle. That way, he believes he can come back alive.”

“... Is that so?”

“He used to say he will try to avoid things like this.”

People would usually take that as a joke.

It can be used for idle talks.

With a serious look, Latreille said.

“In any case, your third faction cannot be ignored, Argentina, if added together with my supporters, it should be enough to decide who to inherit the throne. After all, I have most of the emperor’s followers on my side.”

“So?”

“Be my consort, Argentina.”

“... … … … Huh?!?!”

Altina maintained a surprised look after hearing it.

Even Regis almost wanted to shout out in surprise, but he used his hand to cover his mouth tightly.

Latreille’s proposal was really unexpected.

Prior to this, Regis once thought of having Altina marry the sickly Auguste to achieve her goal and change the nation, but the idea was thrown aside.

Hence he should not be surprised as he once thought of this.

-- So the reason for pulling Altina to his side was for this.

That meant to obtain the third faction’s power via Altina

Altina being famous was also due to Latreille’s faction doing.

Altina’s popularity should not rise that fast even considering that she took the impregnable Volk Fortress. Regis now knew the reason for the dissonance he felt.

Besides, Volk Fortress was not that important to Belgaria strategically. If Volk Fortress was a strategic point for the enemies that might endanger the nation, Belgaria would use 100 to 200 thousand to capture it.

This whole incident is to let the neutral people gather under Altina's banner so that Latreille can make use of her, there is no mistake about it.

Was what Regis thought--

Bastian going abroad as an exchange student is to escape.

Altina was supposed to fall in a failed attempt to capture Volk Fortress.

That will result in the neutrals not having any other option but him.

The first prince did not have any standing in the first place… No matter how indecisive the Emperor was, he would still pass the throne to Latreille without any hesitation.

However, he miscalculated as both Auguste and Altina did not leave the stage.

Perhaps Latreille was very anxious right now.

There was not enough time to eliminate his political enemies. If the Emperor were to die before he was able to get the inheritance rights, Auguste will be crowned as the next Emperor according to the order of succession.

However, the current emperor was still healthy enough to marry another concubine. Normally, it would not be strange if he was to succumb to his old age.

Latreille's side did not take Altina's unexpected results as a failure, instead they turned it into an opportunity for them.

If Argentina was to accept this proposal, all will be over.

Regis wanted to step in when a laughter stopped him from doing so.

“Ahahahahaha! What are you saying, Latreille?”

“... … Huh?”

“Ahaha, it sounds just like Clarisse’s joke.”

“Although I do not know who is Clarisse… But what I said was not a joke. Both of us stand to gain from this proposal.”

“Win-win situation? Is this what should be said for a marriage proposal?”

“Although it’s uncommon to have a marriage between siblings, there will be no problems if we have the Church’s consent.”

“That means you are serious?”

“Of course.”

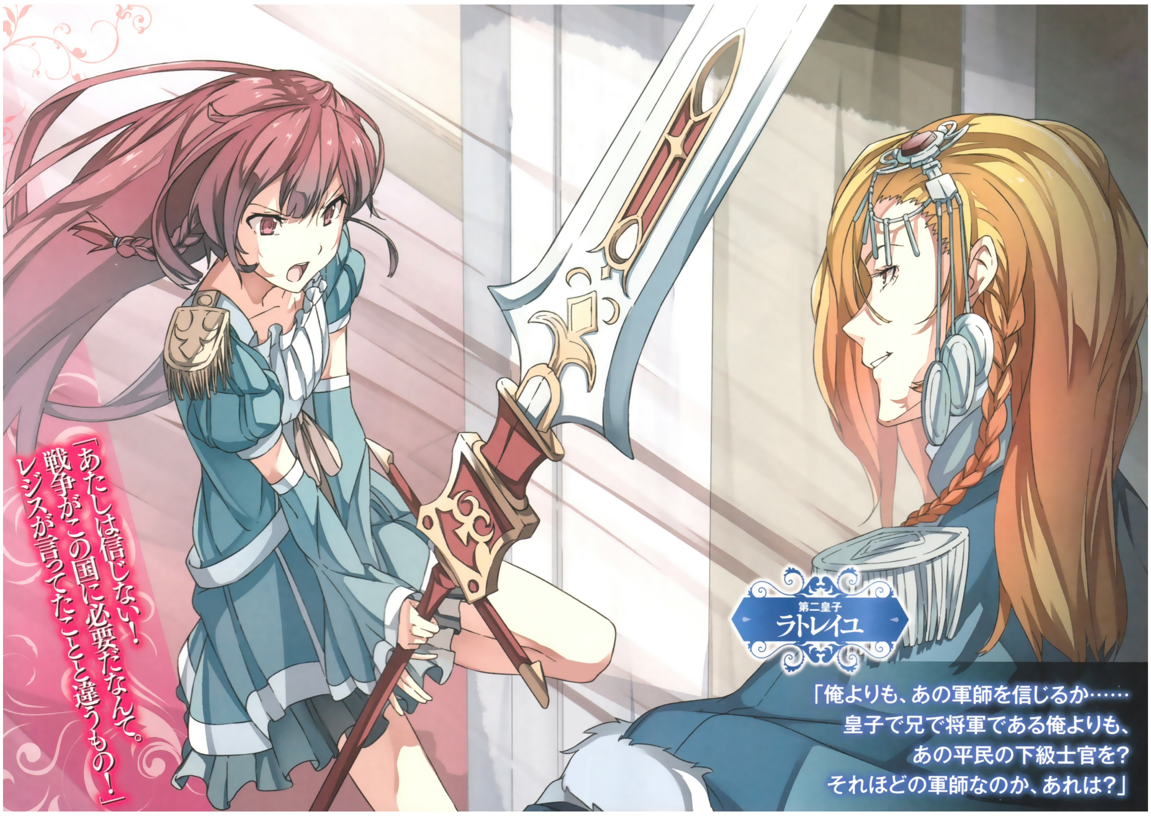
“It is even more dubious if it is true.”

Altina stood up from the bed and approached Latreille for a moment.

At the same time, she reached for her Grand Tonnerre Quatre.

Removing her sword from the hook, Altina slowly removed the sword from the scabbard and held it in front of her vertically.

After the sword was fully drawn, she threw away the scabbard and pointed her sword at Latreille.


「あたしは信じない！
戦争がこの国に必要だなんて。
レジスが言ってたことと違うもの！」
第二皇子
ラトレイユ
「俺よりも、あの軍師を信じるか……
皇子で兄で将軍である俺よりも、
あの平民の下級士官を？
それほどの軍師なのか、あれは？」

“What are you doing?”

“I don’t believe you! Saying that the war is essential, that’s contradicting what Regis said.”

“You trust that strategist more than me?... … As a prince, your brother and a commander, I’m even lower than a mere civilian officer? Is that so? What you picked isn’t a smart choice…”

“Well, even if Regis doesn’t seems reliable…”

Hearing this, Regis felt relief and gratitude towards her.

Altina’s tone gradually intensified.

“-- but he will never lie to me! Nor will he say that waging war is for the nation!”

This was something that Regis told Altina when they were still in the horse carriage.

So you have always trusted me...

Latreille lowered his volume and adopted a tone used for children and said,

“He does not know the situation we are in because he is not involved in the management of the economy, otherwise, his opinion will change.”

“Do not take me as a fool! If you become the emperor, no matter what I have in mind, I will not be able to carry it out! I always trusted Regis, if not for him, I would still be confined in Fort Sierck, no, I could even have fallen while attacking Volk Fortress!”

“That was my mistake, I apologise… However, for the nation, will you support me?”

“If you swear that you will not wage any war.”

“I won’t wage any war that is without benefits.”

“Can’t you just pull back the front lines to more defensible positions?”

“... That is possible, but I will need time.”

“Then, at tomorrow’s banquet, will you swear that in front of the Emperor and the nobles? I’ll only trust you if you can do that.”

Altina looked at him in doubt.

Latreille seemed to be deep in thought.

“... … There are plenty of chance to do that, my dear sister, it doesn’t have to be tomorrow.”

Altina slowly lowered her sword.

“... … From the beginning, you have been looking at me as a child... You always, always take me as a fool!”

Altina’s sword suddenly thrust out.

I didn’t expect you to attack for real! Regis was so shocked his heart almost stopped.

Latreille was prepared, his expression remained the same as when he was still talking.

Suddenly--

He vanished.

In Regis' point of view, Latreille's figure seemed to loom under the moonlight. His speed was not something that humans could obtain.

Even faster than Altina, he also accurately grasped the opportunity.

"You really did it… Don't you feel that you are a bit too reckless, Argentina?"

"Let's end everything here! It's still too early for those kind of words!!"

"How foolish."

"Even so, if you, who will not stop the war even if people die, don't you feel anything at all?! If you become the emperor, you will not stop the war at all, you murderer!!!"

"This is to protect the nation… You need to understand this, Argentina."

"You should just fall here, I'll protect the nation in your stead."

Altina swung her sword after finishing her words.

The sharp sword not only smashed the rocks, but also the railing of the balcony.

It was taking all of Altina's effort to hold her sword due to her left wrist being fractured.

Altina's strikes were even faster and heavier compared to the duel with Jerome. Latreille retreated to the point where his back almost touched the railing.

This was the second floor -- compared to normal buildings, its height was about three stories, it was possible to escape by jumping down.

" Don't be unreasonable…"

Latreille said softly.

Against the next attack, Latreille unsheathed his sword.

Sounds of metal colliding could be heard.

Latreille was able to stop Altina’s attack using his sword.

Was that sword Arme Victoire Volonte?

No, he did not just stop it, but also reflected it.

“You became stronger, Argentina.”

“Urg…”

“Looks like you inherited Baltasar’s skills, however… This era has its own skilled swordsmen, that man has barely adequate skills to be the southern palace instructor.”

“In a fight, the most important thing is to grasp your opponent’s flaw!”

Finishing her words, Altina gave a kick after pressing in with the sword.

On the other hand, Latreille used his knee to block the kick.

Latreille then walked towards Altina who had lost her balance.

“It’s not that I intend to insult the Balzac house that have contributed the most to the nation… However, swordsmanship progresses with time. Giving a kick so soon might be a bad move in these days.”

“There’s an opening!!”

Even when Altina lost her balance, she still gave a kick.

Totally caught off guard, Latreille got kicked in the abdomen.

However, the military uniform for senior officers and generals have leather reinforcing areas that covered the vital parts. The kick that was made while losing balance did not have the effect that Altina hoped for.

While her opponent was still off-guard, Altina repositioned herself.

“I’m not done yet!”

“What a troublesome sister.”

In between Altina’s attacks, Latreille grasped the opportunity and disappeared before her.

“?!?!”

“Hmph… never seen this kind of footwork before, right?”

He swung his sword while saying his words.

The sword was swung so fast that the eyes could not even follow.

Sounds of metal colliding could be heard again.

Altina waved her sword upwards to block the blow, but her eyes couldn’t keep up. The next moment, she felt a strike around her lower body.

Her dress was damaged.

“Kya?!?!”

“ This should be over when you received the blow by swinging your sword upwards… When an attack was aimed at the head, one will react quickly to it. However, their vision will be blocked by their hands and sword, hence they will be unable to determine the opponents next move.”

“You!”

Altina continued to swing her sword.

Once again, Latreille managed to avoid it.

“The Balzac house’s swordsmanship was originally intended to be used with heavy armour to receive blows. However, because of that, the legs aren’t that agile.

Latreille jumped on top of the railing of the balcony.

The slate creaked.

Following that, he began a series of intense attacks. Altina barely managed to block those.

This time, the same attack came from behind. By the time Altina noticed it, it was too late to swing her sword.

“Ha!”

Altina used the hilt of the sword to block the attack.

“Hmph… Did you learn this from Baltasar too?”

“Damn!!!”

Altina used all her strength to swing her sword. However, Latreille thrust his sword, rendering the attack ineffective.

“If you want to hit someone, there’s no need for such big movements...Observe your enemies movements, strike at the place where your opponent intends to attack. That way, you will be able to injure them and cause them to bleed, once they bleed long enough, they will die due to blood loss.”

“Arghhh……”

Altina groaned.

Regis gulped, his back filled with cold sweat.

--So this is the strength of the commander in charge of hundreds of thousands of soldiers?

Regis was feeling a choking tension

However, now was not the time to be idle.

Regis walked towards them with loud footsteps.

“...... Y,your Highness.”

“Huh?”

Altina opened her eyes and mouth in shock.

On the other hand, Latreille did not look surprised at all.

How much did Regis hear or was aware of... those were not revealed in his expression.

“I have been looking for you, Your Highness… The wind is freezing tonight, Prince Latreille, is your conversation over?”

“Erm, That, I…”

“My apologise, Prince Latreille, pardon me for saying, but the princess is tired due to the long journey. Tomorrow is the important anniversary… Let’s end things here, as it’s not good if the princess doesn’t rest well.”

Latreille twitched his mouth for a moment and he sheathed his sword

“Hmm, So be it, our conversation has dragged a little too long.”

Regis then silently saluted.

Altina also picked up the scabbard which was at the balcony.

Biting her lips with her eyes tearing up.

“Argh...”

Latreille then returned to the room.

“Although it’s impossible now, but I will consider your request and give you a suitable answer, Argentina.”

“Hmph… Don’t think you have won, Latreille.”

These words came out of Altina’s mouth.

When escorting Altina back, Altina had said over 30 times “how vexing”.

As I suspected, Latreille did not know that Altina was injured.

Regis slammed the table when Altina was seated.

“Do you understand? Courage and reckless is not the same! The you right now is willful and impatient!

“B,but he reacted…”

“... It’s not wrong to cross swords, however, you reacted to his provocation first. Should Latreille want to pursue this, you might be in prison now.”

“Really?!”

“Your popularity as the 4th princess which could be used as a political means shows how masterful of Latreille… However, I do not have a measure against him now. Altina, in the palace, there are many things that the sword cannot solve, please remember that… Please be more aware of your position.”

“You mean that I’m weak?”

“No, but let’s say that you successfully killed Latreille, we will be hunted down by the guards.”.

“W,will that really happens?”

“... Listen to me, swinging your sword just because of justice make you no different from bandits. Is your goal, your hopes to murder your brother? Or is it to be someone that save the people?”

Altina clenched her hands which were on her knee.

“I… want to be the civilians’ shield.”

“... I believe in your words, if you are aware of it, no matter what kind of opponents you face, you will not fail. If it’s not for national interests, do not draw your sword. A ruler that ignores public opinion is the beginning of a tyrannical rule.”

“I understand.”

This prideful 14 year old girl was shouldering the heavy political struggle.

Is it even possible for her to think before acting? That frank character of hers was starting to show some flaws.

“It’s also my fault on this issue, I’m sorry.”

“Eh!? You never do anything wrong!”

“... There’s more things I can do right now due to the situation… I need to work harder, you too, Altina, as the princess, you need to be careful of your action.”

“Nn.”

“Please keep in mind.”

“That… Regis,”

“Yes?”

“... Sorry for making you worry.”

“A,aah… You should say this to Eric instead of me.”

After some time, the pale Eric returned drenched in sweat. Altina then thanked him.

Seeing Altina unharmed, Eric felt relieved.

The red tea that was prepared by Clarisse was served.

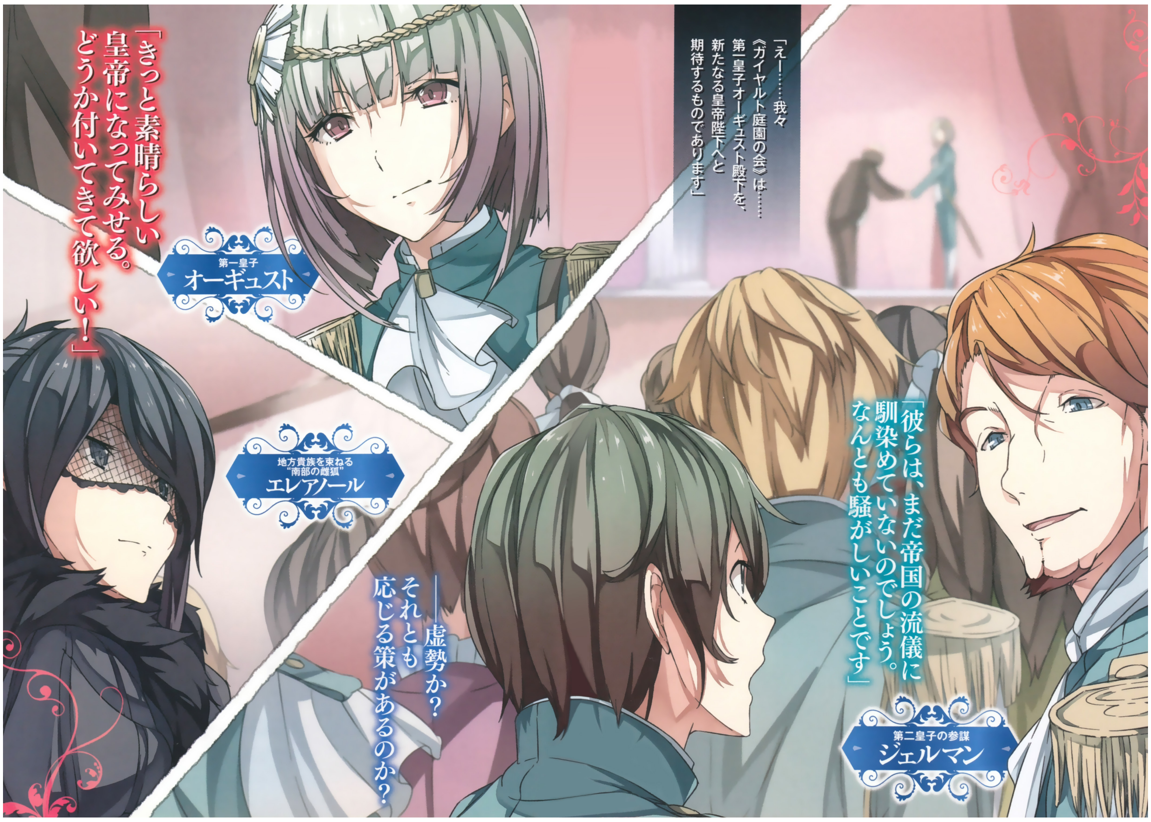
The low-esteem Regis made up his mind after seeing the two people who wanted to protect Altina.

Gradually, the moon could be seen rising through the window.

This time was a defeat, however...

“... It’s about time to strike back.”

Chapter 3 - Founding Anniversary


「え一……我々
《ガイヤルト庭園の会》は……
第一皇子オーギュスト殿下を、
新たなる皇帝陛下へと
期待するものであります」
「彼らは、まだ帝国の流儀に
馴染めていないのでしょう。
なんとも騒がしいことです」
第二皇子の参謀
ジェルマン
──虚勢か？
それとも
応じる策があるのか？
第一皇子
オーギュスト
「きっと素晴らしい
皇帝になってみせる。
どうか付いてきて欲しい！」
地方貴族を束ねる
“南部の雌狐”
エレアノール

“Ah, bring that over here!”

Altina suddenly said.

“Your Highness, if you keep moving like that, your hair will get messy.”

“Hmm, don’t you feel that this headdress is cute?”

“Yes, yes. Please be seated in front of the mirror. Do not move around until your hair is done.”

“Umm...”

It was the afternoon of the second day since they arrived at the capital——

The capital Founding anniversary was about to start. The streets were filled with festivity while the palace was also doing their last touch up.

However, it was a battlefield to Altina. To be exact, it was a battle in which Clarisse was helping to groom Altina’s hair.

“Clarisse, I still think that that colour accessory looks nicer here.”

Altina was in a dilemma, not knowing to choose the green or the yellow hair accessory.

“Your Highness will look cute in either one.”

“As expected, Clarisse’s opinion was not worth asking.”

“Ara, what a shame.”

Altina asked the figure which was reflected in the mirror.

“Regis, which one do you think is nicer?”

“Rather than worrying about that, I feel that we should worry about the fact that the banquet is about to start in 10 minutes.”

The banquet was scheduled to begin in the afternoon at 4 o’clock.

“Really… Ah, Eric, what do you think?”

Eric, who was dragged in, looked carefully.

“How beautiful…”

“Although it feels like a sly answer, but thanks anyway”

“Ah! S,sorry, it is perfect…”

Seeing this, Clarisse jokingly said,

“Why don’t you try out the dress?”

“Ehh! Ah, no, I,I’m a man…you tease , Aha,ahahaha…”

For a moment, Eric seems to reveal an envious look.

I must be seeing things...

The one with the face of a young girl was the Blanchard house’s heir, Eric.

Evrard, who was both the head of the Blanchard house and the grandfather of Eric, told Regis that Eric who had no brothers, had been following the family rules strictly ever since his father died in the war.

“... Well, I feel that it’s quite suitable.”

Eric replied frantically after hearing what Regis muttered.

“R,really? Does that dress really suit me?!”

“Eh? Ahh, yes…”

“Is that so?... H,how troublesome…”

“...Why…”

“I,if Regis really~~ wants me to wear it, it’s not…”

“I absolutely will not say that!?”

Regis saw a cold look from Altina that was reflected by the mirror.

On the other hand, Clarisse was happily laughing.

“How terrible, Your Highness, Regis is heading towards a dangerous path of no return.”

“Yes, however, only a narrow-minded person will interfere with the subordinate's preference. Well, I’ll just close my eyes on this, I really will not speak of this, really!.”

“... I won’t cross that line!”

“You have such interests since the beginning?”

“Please spare me, Clarisse.”

Time flies as they teased Regis.

“Ah… It’s almost time, it’s going to be troublesome if we don’t leave now.”

“Nn, I’m done here too.”

Clarisse raised both her hand and said.

Altina stood up unsteadily as she was not used to the dress.

The crimson hair coupled with the dark dress.

Coupled with the dark dress, the hair band, wavy and pleated, is like a blossoming flower on her long crimson hair

Regis went silent after seeing the snow-white skin of her neck, torso and chest area.

“... “

“Why? Does it feels weird?”

“Eh? Ah, i,it’s very beautiful…”

“Waa~~”

“Ah, It’s almost time.”

“Eh~ Say it one more time, just one more time is enough.”

“... it’s almost time.”

“Not this sentence!!!”

I know what she meant, but it’s too embarrassing to say it out loud.

Today’s banquet was hosted by the ceremony’s department. Only those who were invited could enter and were mostly nobles.

Regis came to the palace as Altina’s aide, hence he was not invited. Therefore, Clarisse and him had to wait in the waiting room.

The safety of the people attending the event were the responsibility of the imperial guards, it is the same for Eric who was an escort.

Altina who was done with her make-up looked at Regis’ head and pondered.

“Don’t you think that it’s better for you to gel your hair?”

“It’s unnecessary since I’m not invited, there’s no helping it.”

“I see, but since it’s a rare occasion, it’s fine to gel it a bit.”

“Even so, all I can do is to wait in the waiting room.

“Ara? Aren’t you going to accompany me in.”

“If I were to follow you in, I’ll stand out like a mountain. Attendance of this event is by invitation only.”

“Even so, you are also invited.”

“... What did you just say?”

Altina showed a face as if it was normal and said,

“Although the department forbids it, but those attending the banquet are allowed to bring another companion. Aside from those lower level invitees, the rest will bring along their relatives or friends to attend.”

That reminds me, I once read a novel in which the characters attending an event in the palace brought their friends along.

Never once did I dream that I will be one of those people.

“... … Do I need to attend? To a event with only nobles or the royalty?

“Of course.”

“... … Even if you say so suddenly, I…”

“You can’t?”

“I wasn’t prepared for this. Besides, I don’t have suitable clothing.”

“There’s no problem.” Clarisse said as she opened the suitcase.

“I thought this might happen, so I brought along your ceremonial clothes.”

“Since when?!”

“Isn’t it fine? As expected of Clarisse. Regis, quickly go and change your clothes.”

“But the banquet has already started.”

While he was talking, the fanfare could be heard from the distance

However, Altina did not seem to care at all.

“It’s fine to be late a little. Besides, the royalty tends to go slightly later.”

“... I see.”

There was no helping to it since things have became this way.

With no other option, Regis changed from his military uniform to his ceremonial full dress uniform.

Ever since Regis was exiled to Beilschmidt border regiment, be it the new year celebration or officially entering the team, it was all done frantically. This was the first time Regis wore full dress uniform since he was assigned to the borders.

Like the other nobles in the capital, Marquis Thenezay will invite friends over to his mansion and host a banquet.

He was known not just for his extravagant behaviour, but for maintaining relations with the nobles.

Nobles that bankrupted their family wealth because of their vanity was not unheard of.

Some nobles who were self-conscious would stop their wasteful behaviour to avoid ridicule from others. However, there are also some who would increase taxes and oppressed the citizens instead.

“That’s why I do not like to attend this kind of events…”

“Well, I’ll not force you if you really can’t.”

Regis and the rest were already at the corridor at this point.

Altina who was beside Regis checked him out.

A green uniform with a white scarf and golden lock-shape accessory at the chest. At the waist was a red cloth hanging down, acting as a garment. Although it was ceremonial clothing, it looked very stylish. If one wore this to the battlefield, he would definitely draw the attention of the enemies.

Altina lightly elbowed Regis.

“It looks good on you.”

“... My shoulders aren’t broad and I’m not that tall, so it shouldn’t be as good as you said. If I wore some medals on my chest, it might be better.”

“Do you want medals? If so, why not apply for it? It should be fine if you apply for it.”

“Well, this kind of medals should be heavy, that would make my shoulder uncomfortable, so forget it.”

“Ahaha, that way of dismissing a medal sure is unique. Ah, since you don’t like wearing military uniform, why not try the dress from earlier for the event tomorrow? How about it? You might even like it.”

As Altina skipped around, the frills on her dress swayed along with her.

How cute, was what Regis thought. He never thought about wanting to wear such dress, which was a relief.

“... Thanks but no thanks… Although I do not like such events, but it’s a good opportunity to see Latreille’s schemes. Gathering intelligence is necessary.”

“There’s nothing better than that.”

“... However, I’m afraid of screwing up during the banquet, which is making me anxious.”

“Don’t the books you read have anything about the etiquette in such events?”

“... … I did read such things before, just that I’m not good in things like a dance.”

“Ahh, in that case it’s fine, because I’m not good in it too.”

“Even though your motor coordination is great, how strange.”

"That's because the dance instructor kept getting mad. She kept saying 'your movement is too sharp because you learnt fencing. Dancing requires working together with your partner, synchronizing both of your breathing is the most important point. Why do the men dancing with your highness kept getting tossed around? Men are not the swords in your hands, alright?'"

“I see… It’s because the difference in arm strength is too large. In that case, isn’t it better if the royalty teach you? Doesn’t the royalty excel in this?”

“Latreille is more strict than the instructor, so it’s definitely a no! Auguste seldom comes to such events and Bastian was banned from attending such events.”

“What did prince Bastian do?”

“... … Well, a lot of things happened.”

I kind of sympathise with the emperor, his children are all kinds of trouble.

As they got closer to the venue, the sound of music got louder.

At all of the entrances to the venue, there were old butlers verifying the invitation.

One look and people could tell that this was not a place civilians can enter. Regis’ heart was beating fast.

Noticing that it was Altina, all the butlers bowed and then announced her arrival.

“Her Royal highness, 4th princess of Belgaria, Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria~”

All of a sudden, the music stopped playing and the venue fell silent, all of their eyes looked towards them.

One year ago, she was a princess borned by a commoner, a target of envy and slandering.

Now, she had become an experienced soldier through the glory of battle.

Altina entered the noisy venue without any hesitation, Regis followed behind her.

“Argh…”

“Why are you glancing around, did something happens? If you’re thirsty, drinks will be served later.”

“... This feels like another world with nobles everywhere, just like those in the theater.”

“Just that? What’s so interesting about that?”

“You can’t really say that.”

Although many of the attendees had yet to show up, but there was at least 100 nobles at the venue socialising as of now.

Located at the central of the south, a large reception hall was used as the banquet hall. The roof was even higher than the city wall and there were many chandeliers hanging down, it looked as if the roof was a starry sky.

The walls were covered with floral pattern wallpaper while the couches were covered with a soft carpet.

At the front of the banquet hall was a podium that looked like those at a theater while the middle was a dance stage. Tables filled with fine cuisine were located close to the walls. There were also six counters, each with a sommelier pouring wine for the guests. At the back of the hall was a resting area filled with sofas.

From the corner of the food table, one could smell the fragrance of rose.

This fragrance made the guests feel as if they were in a rose garden.

The orchestra located at one corner was performing a cheerful song.

Altina glanced around the hall.

“Latreille seems to be here, but is Auguste here? Ah… That woman is here too.”

At the centre of a crowd, there was girl wearing a fanciful sparkling dress.

She was the one that the emperor recently married.

The 6th concubine.

Johaprecia Octovia Fon Estaburg.

Because she was married to the emperor, her last name was changed to Belgaria.

Originally a Estaburg princess, she had deep diplomatic relations with many nobles in the eastern part of Belgaria.

The eastern domain had been under Belgaria for about 100 years. Back then, the rulers of that area surrendered to the Empire before any war started and was bestowed with nobility.

Incidentally, other eastern rulers that opposed the Empire were either sentenced to death or exiled.

Though there was no clear demarcation, the nobles that occupied those territories were referred as the "New Nobles", and were a target of scorn and discrimination by the countrymen and nobles.

Johaprecia showed-off the large gem in front of her chest to the people surrounding her.

“Ohoho, His Majesty gave me this gem for my birthday, he originally wanted to gift me an even larger gem.”

“Oohh, as expected of His Majesty.”

“I have enough necklaces though, I will make something else next time”

“Your Highness, what do you think about earrings?”

“Ara, that can’t do, the next gem could be even larger than this, my earlobe will be stretched, Ohohoho.”

Johaprecia laughed loudly, the nobles surrounding her laughed along too.

Regis muttered to himself,

——Looks like the rumours of her being pampered is true.

If one looked carefully, they will realise that the nobles were split into their factions.

Auguste’s faction ——Headed by the 2nd concubine Catherine, her family, duke Trouin’s house and their supporters. This were the Empire oldest nobles, especially nobles who held lands in the west, however they were lacking in financial and military strength.

Latreille’s faction —— With the empress and her family leading the central nobles who held lands in the capital, they have a large presence in the military.

Lastly, Altina's faction has no connections to any of the other factions.

Someone bowed to Altina

He was a middle-aged gentleman.

It was the rules of the nobles not to speak first in front of the royalty. If Altina did not speak first, the conversation would not start. In this case, Altina did not have a reason to ignore him.

“Erm… Hello.”

“That will be rather rude, Your Highness, isn’t this your first time meeting him?”

“Ahh, pleased to meet you.”

The other party seemed to be an Earl that had territory at the southwest borders, rumoured to be brave. It seemed like he had something that must consulted with Altina.

Altina had been ignoring most banquet invitation, hence she did have the habit to greet others.

Regis felt nervous watching this scene.

Nobles that have the same thoughts as the gentleman began to gather around Altina in circles.

Some of the nobles are “New Nobles” while some seemed to have information on the other factions. These people were termed as the neutrals.

With this, it should be enough to form the third faction.

Seeing so many nobles who were able to attend the banquet being in the neutral faction, Regis understood why Latreille wanted to pull Altina in.

Even so, the topic for the conversation seemed to be just greeting and flattering, nothing about any news.

Regis closed in to Altina and whispered.

“... Try to remember these people and their names, I’m going to check the other places.”

“Eh? Regis..?”

“Yes?”

“Ah, no, it’s nothing, thanks for your hard work.”

“Yeah.”

Feeling that this time was different from other events, Altina decided to change her usual indifferent attitude.

While holding a wine glass, Regis moved towards the centre of the hall.

From there, it was possible to see who was conversing with who, this was how intelligence was gathered.

Because Regis did not know who was worth looking into, he went to borrow the guest list from the ceremony's department staff, using the excuse of checking whether any friends of his came.

Information that outsiders absolutely would not able to get was easily obtained here

Duke Trouin's house which the 2nd concubine Catherine was from agreed to come, but they had not turned up yet.

There were other absentees that did not inform the ceremony's departments… Those were mostly big shots.

"Ah!"

Beside Altina's name was "Regis Auric, Commoner, 5th Grade Admin Officer", Regis felt weird seeing this.

Once again, he felt the dissonance of this event and him.

After thanking the staff, he returned the list to them.

After which, Regis continued to gather intelligence at the hall that he needed.

"Ah! Sir Regis!"

Hearing this familiar way of calling his name, Regis knew that he was the one he debated with on the carriage.

"... Good evening, Sir Germain."

"Welcome to the banquet, Sir Regis, no matter what, this time you're the hero."

"... It's thanks to Her Highness' effort, I was just lucky to work under her. Moreover, I'm here as Her Highness attendant."

"Is that so? Just now, there were some girls that wanted to know about you."

Regis looked towards the direction Germain pointed to, only to see

3 girls looking over here with an embarrassed smile.

In their left hand was a frilly fan that covered the lower half of their face, without saying anything, they pointed to the front of their fan.

In this age, conveying their feelings using the fan like that, was known as “Language of Fan” was popular among the noblewomen.

Using the left hand to hold the fan in front of the face meant “I want to be closer to you” while touching the fan meant “I want to talk to you”.

Regis turned his line of sight away from there and deliberately coughed.

——Did those noblewomen arrange this?

Regis had been undoubtedly believed that he himself would not receive admiration from the ladies.

Latreille’s method of pulling Altina in and his other goals of his were made clear. This time was to send those girls to seduce and confuse me, in other words, using greetings as an excuse to trick me.

No matter what methods you use, I will not fall for it.

“... I’m very sorry, I’m not interested in girls.”

“Ohoh… I see, so it’s that…”

Germain deliberately blinked his eyes.

“I,I,I don't mean that, don’t misunderstand.”

Regis suddenly was shaken. As expected of Latreille’s closest aide.

“Well, I only wanted to help you establish good relations.”

“... It’s my honour.”

“His Highness Latreille said that he was very worried about last night.”

“Eh?”

Regis was surprised hearing these words. To win, Latreille proposed to Altina and used force, Regis thought Latreille should be more pleased instead.

“On the surface, he looked strong, however, he is fragile emotionally. After returning, he kept thinking whether if he had overdone things and was quite depressed.”

“... Is that so?”

“Even so, it’s not the right time for him to talk to the princess again.”

“Yeah, perhaps after some time.”

“I think that next time they have a conversation, they should bring you along. What do you think?”

“Me? With the prince and princess?”

At that moment, Regis imagined both “Arme Victoire Volonte” and “Grand Tonnerre Quatre” slashing each other, causing his body to twitch.

“If it’s possible, tonight…”

Before Germain could finish his words, a loud voice interrupted him.

“—— Good evening to everyone!”

As his words was interrupted, Germain unhappily looked towards the direction of the voice.

There was an elegant old man on the stage covered with red carpet. There were a few people standing around him.

Germain smacked his lips and said.

“Hmph, a new noble…”

“Who is that?”

“He’s the “New Nobility” Duke Tiraso Laverde, owning a large plantation at the southern territory. He is one of those cowards that surrendered before the Empire invaded them.”

“... I see.”

As an opposition of the Empire, resistance without any military strength was pointless.

This was the outcome of the political negotiation. To prevent the Empire from invading, surrendering was the best choice. That was what Regis thought.

After opening the parchment, the elegant old man, Tiraso Laverde, took a glance of the hall.

Among the crowd, there was a young woman who dressed like a black-coloured bird, as both her hair and dress was pitch black. Because of the veil she was wearing, one could not see her face clearly, however, they could feel her exuding an unapproachable aura.

She turned and left after nodding.

Seeing this, Tiraso Laverde began reading from the parchment.

“We, the nobles that was bestowed land in the southern area, are termed the “New Nobles” by most,”

What was he trying to say? This was what the other nobles’ eyes seemed to give off.

Tiraso Laverde continued to speak.

“To the original nobles that have close ties to each others, we are weak if we continue to be fragmented. Er, hence, I hereby announce the establishment of the Gaillarde Garden’s Alliance, formed by the New Nobles.”

Hearing these words, the audiences were in an uproar.

Duke Tiraso Laverde ignored the commotion and continued.

“Up to now, we, the Gaillarde Garden’s Alliance, did not support any of the princes.”

Which meant they currently belonged to the neutral and were an influential force.

Since they have specially said it here, what comes next would be their choice of alignment.

It was not impossible for them to support Altina, thinking this, Regis could not help but tense up.

Tiraso Laverde’s breathing began to quicken and his pacing was getting messy.

“Erm… We, the Gaillarde Garden’s Alliance... are looking forward to the day when Prince Auguste inherit the crown… We… will fully support him… His Highness… is still battling his illness… but we believe that His Highness will triumph over the disease… Recently, His Highness continues to fulfil his duty despite being ill… His action can be comparable to the previous generations crown prince… Ahem… Ahem… We believe in His Highness Auguste.”

“Thank you for trusting in me.”

Auguste appeared on the stage.

This was totally a premeditated show

Auguste approached the duke and shook hand with him.

“Everyone from the Gaillarde garden’s Alliance, as to express my gratitude for your support, I will definitely be a great emperor, please continue to support me.”

Not just the people on stage, there were even some audiences applauding. These should be from Auguste’s supporter, from the sound of it, there seemed to be many of them.

Once the important part of the speech was over, the content behind was all concise.

The Gaillarde Garden's Alliance were a group of new nobles from the southern part. They were different from the old nobles that support Auguste, or the big nobles of the capital's outskirts that support Latreille.

Which meant that they originally were neutral.

They gathered, formed an alliance and joined Auguste’s faction.

Recently, rumours of the prince fulfilling his duty despite his illness reached Regis’ ears.

However, there were nobody raising doubts about this, hence it was likely to be true.

Although there were an increasing number of people supporting Altina... Was the sudden appearance of the alliance an indication of a change in politics? Or did it mean that from the start, a part of Auguste’s supporters were mixed in the neutrals.

The nobles at the hall were at a loss and whispered to each other.

In particular to some nobles, their face looked grim

Towards the neutrals that decided to support his political enemy, Latreille and his faction should be the most unsettled.

However, Germain’s expression did not change at all.

“How troublesome, don’t you think so, Sir Regis? It seems that these people have yet to understand the culture of the Empire, to actually do this kind of thing here.”

“... Eh, erm… Yeah.”

“Is anything wrong, Sir Regis? You don’t look very good.”

“... Because I’m not used to such events, I’m a little tired. Sorry about this.”

Looking at the current situation, the emperor would pass the throne to Auguste, did he, who was Latreille closest aide, not see this dangerous situation?

Not just Germain, even Latreille was still laughing with others.

—— Is it a bluff? Or that they have a countermeasure for this?

To be unable to tell what these two guys are thinking, how scary.

Germain then quietly walk over.

“For the conversation to be interrupted, I’m sorry, Sir Regis.”

“Eh?”

“His Highness wishes to speak with you privately, is it possible for you to come to the prince’s room at 10 o’clock tonight?”

“...Is it really alright for me to enter there?”

“Of course, we will inform the guards.”

This situation was akin to being check by the opponent in chess. Since they already moved, how should we respond?

Moreover, we lack any pieces to use as retaliation.

Even if I can avoid now, I’ll still need to face them in the future.

“... I understand, I will go.”

Germain replied as if he have expected this.

“That’s great, in this case, I’ll have to go first.”

After giving a bow, he left without turning back.

Suddenly, Regis’ throat felt very dry.

When he came to his sense, the wine glass in his hand was empty. Even though it was a high grade wine, he could not taste anything at all.

Hence, Regis went to the wine counter.

“... White wine please.”

“Understood.”

Greenish amber liquid was poured into the transparent wine glass.

Receiving the glass back, Regis drank a sip of the wine. The wine was very refreshing, an unforgettable taste with an aroma of a fruit.

“... How delicious, this is my first time drinking such wine.”

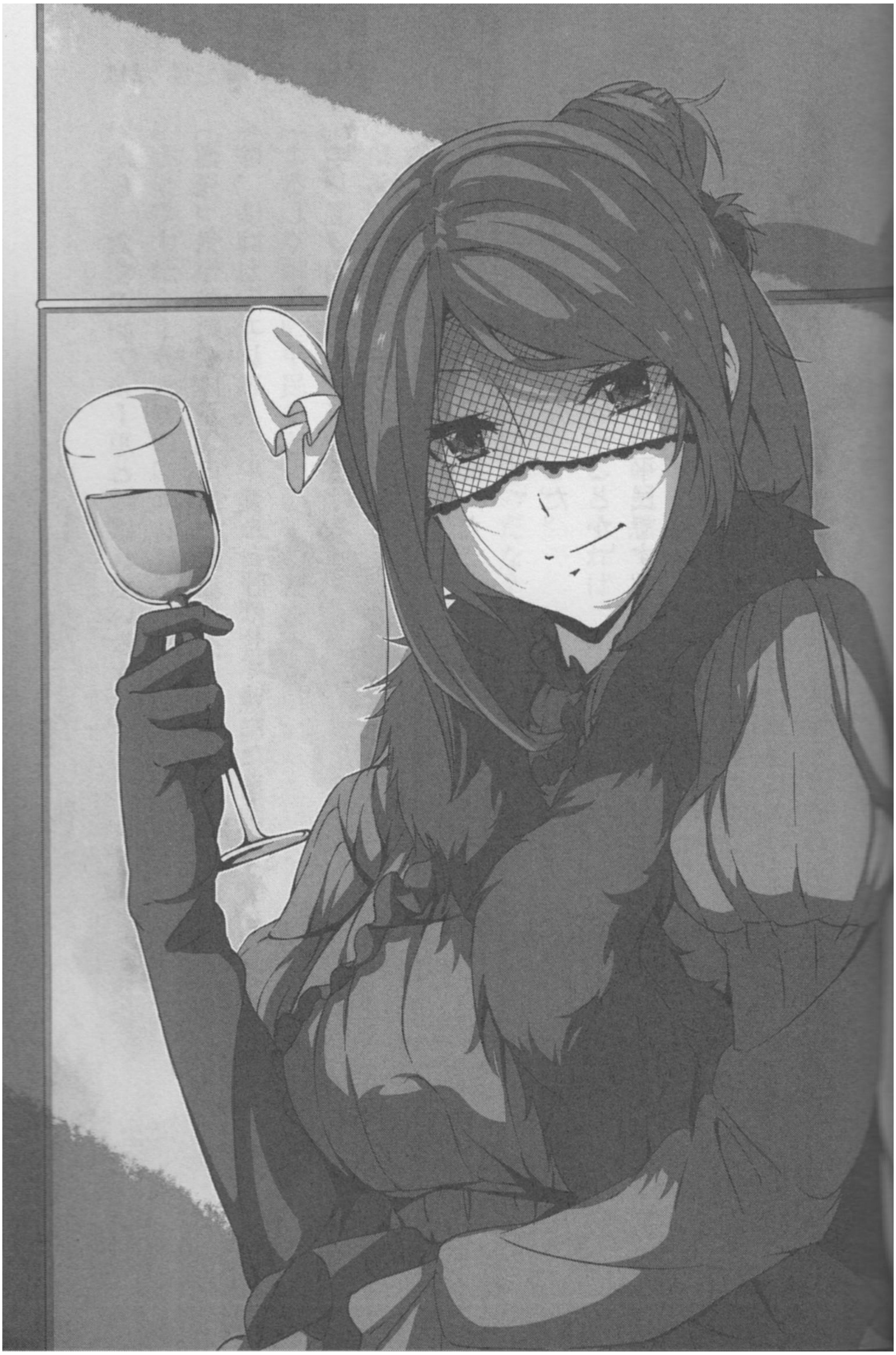
“Hehe, thank you very much for your praise.”

“Eh?”

“This wine was produced by my winery. These wines are like children to me.”

The one who interjected was a woman wearing black dress, she seemed to be around 20 year old.

With black hair extending to her waist, her obsidian eyes looked at Regis behind the cover of a black veil.



“... Hello, this wine is really tasty.”

“Give me white wine too.”

The sommelier took the glass and poured the white wine into the glass.

She then received the glass and tasted the wine.

Regis was silently waiting for her to speak as she intrigued him.

If I didn’t see wrongly, she should be the one that Duke Tiraso Laverde was looking at when he announced the formation of the “Gaillarde Garden’s Alliance”. Rather than just looking, he seemed to be asking for consent...

“It really is tasty.”

“... Pleased to meet you, I’m Regis Auric, 5th grade admin officer.”

“I heard of your name before you came to the capital, it seems that you are the strategist in the northern war front who achieved major accomplishments.”

“The one who accomplished great things wasn’t me, it is Her Highness princess Argentina.”

“Humility is a virtue, proud, arrogant merchants wouldn’t be able to earn.”

“... I,is that so?”

“I’m Eleanor Ailred Winn de Tiraso Laverde.”

“You’re someone from the Tiraso Laverde house?... Then the gentleman earlier…”

“He’s my grandfather. I usually conduct business outside together with him. Because our last name is the same, it’s fine to call me Eleanor.”

“Because I’m a little successful in business, I’m also known as the “Vixen of the South”.”:

“Ah, I see… I think I’ll just call you Eleanor. That reminds me, you can call me Regis.”

“Okay, nice to meet you.”

Eleanor raised her glass and tilted it slightly as a greeting.

Seeing this, Regis drank his wine.

“... gulp*

“That reminds me, I never heard of the Auric house before… May I know what’s your title?”

“Eh? Aahh, I’m just a commoner.”

Eleanor squinted.

“Which means… You’re a knight?”

“No no, I’m just a normal commoner. I’m here as an attendant of Her Highness Argentina, otherwise, my status wouldn’t even allow me to be here.”

“Just a commoner? I heard that you are a very outstanding strategist.”

“I’m indeed a strategist… However it was just a post in the military, unrelated to any titles.”

Normally, high ranking military posts were held by nobles. Cases in which nobility title was bestowed to strategist were numerous, but that was not always the case.

Eleanor looked at Regis as if she was looking at a rare animal.

“Isn’t the post strategist only for people that are very capable?”

“Well… I don’t find myself very capable, especially in horse riding and swordsmanship. The only reason I could take this position is because I'm only capable of using my brain and I just happened to know some things.”

“In other words, Regis, you’re quite smart?”

Eleanor simply just said his name out.

It looks like she wouldn’t use honorific on someone that seems to be younger than her. Well, that’s to be expected.

“... At least I don’t find myself too dumb.”

“How impressive, to think there is a smart commoner.”

“T,that should be normal, be it an admin officer, teachers or doctors, these jobs are filled with commoners.”

“Ahh, to be competent enough to be a strategist, a major contributor and to be even more outstanding than the enemy general, so that’s you?”

“... I think so, even though these are fact, but the way you say it is…”

“Is there anything wrong?”

“It’s thanks to the bravery of the soldiers. I never once thought that I’m better than the enemy general.”

Although Volk Fortress was captured successfully in the end, but if there was a mistake in the measurement, or if the digging was slower than expected or that the invading force got repelled, the strategy will fail.

In addition, thanks to Altina who defeated the enemy general, they obtained victory.

Eleanor’s eyes changed, as if she was a merchant appraising a good.

“What an interesting man.”

“... I,is that so?

“How old are you?”

“18… I’m going to be 19 soon.”

“Are you interested in business? Opportunities in military are rare for commoners, why not switch to a career that suits you?”

“Ehh?”

“What’s your current salary?”

“Well, a 5th grade admin officer could only earn that much.”

“If you work under me, I’m willingly to pay 3, no 5 times the amount, 4000 deniers per month.”

5 times… I wonder how many books I can buy.”

Even so, Regis shook his head.

“M,my apologies, I’m not interested in money.”

“In this case… I already have 3 spouse, are you willing to be the fourth? Or is it that you are interested in my sister, although she’s just eight year old.”

“No, I do not need a partner now… Ah, of course, I’m not interested in males too.”

“To not have any desire, just like a merchant.”

“Thanks…”

To be caught up in her pace.

Looks like I’m still not used to interacting with older women, Regis thought as he sighed in his heart.

That can’t do, I haven’t obtained any information that are beneficial to Altina.

——Let’s try testing her.

“Gaillarde Garden’s Alliance this time is determined. To actually bet their reputation and lives to oppose the central nobles. Even considering that the western nobles have some military power and the southern nobles having financial strength, should an armed conflict arise, it will still be futile.”

“I’m not clever enough to talk about politics.”

“But your grandfather doesn’t seem to think that way.”

Regis cleverly changed the topic and took control of the pace.

Eleanor gave a wry smile.

“Ara, even though I’m outside the stage, I still got caught?... Grandfather easily gets conceited and doesn’t have the guts to do big things. As a philanthropist, his reputation was fine.”

“... As I expected, the one who gathered the southern nobles is you, am I wrong, Ms Eleanor?”

“It couldn’t be helped as this was all caused by the central nobles. Giving us unfavourable conditions and using political marriage to obtain hostages.”

This was also a method that nobles commonly used.

If force was permissible, they would use force. For those who were submissive, they would oppress them using negotiation.

From a small nation in the west, Belgaria continued to annex lands within this continent, and shifted the imperial capital here more than 300 years ago.

For their own gains, the nobles kept sapping strength away from the nation and became more powerful. Eventually, this would lead to the collapse of the Empire.

Just like a snake eating its own tail.

“... There’s a chance of winning, Prince Auguste is the key to this.”

“To us, the formation of the alliance was an ‘important thing’, joining Auguste’s camp will solve everything. We will definitely win.”

Eleanor raised her red wine glass, as if she was giving a toast to Regis.

“His Highness Auguste seems to have recovered… He is now able to act in such a situation before the emperor and the other nobles.”

“Ahh, which situation?”

Regis fiddled the empty glass with his hand.

“... Which also means that prince Auguste can now hold a position befitting his status, for example, replacing prince Latreille as the commander-in-chief. Perhaps he is already asking the emperor.”

If Auguste really did ask the emperor for this, Latreille would have a huge reaction.

If that was the case, it would be an aggressive political stance and could be viewed as a revenge attempt.

“... In that case, it’s confirmed that prince Auguste is inheriting the throne. The ones supporting him will be already discussing who to be the chancellor now.”

“Ah, well, we are only 60% of his supporter, moreover, prince Auguste sides those old western nobles.”

“Ehhh…”

The mother of Auguste was the 2nd concubine Catherine, who was from the Trouin’s house that had always supported him. Should Auguste succeed the throne, they will be able to gain the most wealth, power and fame.

“Although it’s difficult, but this way, we will be able to defeat the central nobles. Letting the western nobles gain isn’t a bad thing to us too.”

What Eleanor said was not wrong either

Even if Auguste became the emperor, there was no benefits to the southern New Nobles.

That was why they originally joined the third party, Altina’s faction.

However, how did Auguste managed to pull these neutral nobles to his side?

Regis fell into deep thoughts.

There should be others who were thinking about this. A book analyzing what would happen if something similar was to happen had been published a few years ago as a recreation literature piece in the underground market.

Hence, Regis used that as a new reference point

“To end the fight between the central and western nobles by forming the alliance isn’t hard. There should be some other purpose, which is the ‘something’ you mentioned earlier.”

“Oh?”

Eleanor’s eyes changed.

Regis continued saying.

“... … To the north is the powerful Germania federation. To the west, a large sea is between us and High Britannia. In contrast, to the east is the declining Estaburg while the south is the Hispania empire whose military mainly consists of the navy. The probability of the Empire getting the land here is high… When seeing the map, It's not strange for people to think that "the capital could be on a more convenient place".”

“Fufufu, it’s a waste to give you to my sister.”

“... Once prince Auguste inherits the throne, will he move the capital to the south?”

Eleanor drank the remaining wine in her glass.

The thick fragrance of the wine was exhaled from the nose.

“Fufu, moving the capital? Indeed, that way the south will flourish, however, will the western nobles allow it?”

“Normally, they wouldn’t… However, it will be different if there is someone who is influential enough suggest this. For example, having the world’s greatest son and becoming the king’s mother —— for example, Her Highness Catherine.”

The Trouin house in which the 2nd concubine Catherine came from was very influential over the western nobles.

If her son was to succeed the throne, her words would be even more influential.

Furthermore, if the Gaillarde Garden’s Alliance also suggest this, the moving of capital would be certain.

“Fufu, what an interesting way of thinking.”

“...Personally, forcing a change of capital when the nation treasury is critically low makes me uneasy.”

“Isn’t it fine to just borrow from the nobles? If there’s interests, they will be willing to lend… … Well, let’s leave it for when it happens.”

What Eleanor meant by borrowing was to oppress them.

“... … So you mean that Latreille can only wait for his defeat?”

“Do not forget that Latreille is also a soldier, he is neither a politician nor a merchant. The essential thing is whether he can assassinate prince Auguste.”

“You have a countermeasure?”

“If you have any ideas, please let me hear it.”

“Then pardon me… … If I am in Latreille’s shoe, I will consider something else that is of equal importance to eliminating Prince Auguste.”

“What is it?”

“... To eliminate the neutrals, as you guys are a threat. If you are to be eliminated, Latreille will be able to eliminate Auguste… … Once Auguste’s faction loses their power, the other princes will not support you.”

“That might be so. However, those who jumped onto the bandwagon will be the target of insult and not willing to trust anything.”

“... Although that is correct, those neutrals who did now show support in either faction can still support other princes. After all, it’s possible that the time the emperor might elect the successor is still far away.”

“ I have heard of the emperor’s infatuation with increasing his heirs. If I’m not wrong, another red-pupil male will be born soon.”

Regis thought that this kind of thinking was flawed.

A human's ability was not decided by hair or eye colours, nor was it related to character.

This superstitious was formed by the millions of Empire's citizens, so it could not be helped.

"... Hence, considering in Latreille's position, eliminating the neutrals that show no allegiance to anyone or eliminating the other candidates is also possible."

"Indeed, if the first prince was to be eliminated, others who oppose him will be troubled."

Regis nodded in agreement

The neutrals would have the rights to choose who they would swear allegiance to. The old emperor was to name who to inherit his throne, but he was actually busy increasing his heirs.

"... … So there's the possibility of the second prince eliminating his political enemies… … In that case, aside from the first prince, isn't the fourth princess also a target for elimination?"

"Ah, no… Well… In short, what's important to the second prince is to eliminate his political enemies. In other words, it is of equal importance to either eliminate the prince Auguste or the neutrals."

"Ara, is that so? He just needs to keep his place at the top of the order of succession, once His Majesty retires, there will be no problems at all."

"... ...This kind of thing that can make Latreille anxious… Won't be seen for the next few years."

"Are you sure about it?"

Although the emperor was old, he was still healthy enough to marry a 15 year old princess.

Looks like the emperor will still be sitting on his throne for quite some time.

“... … For the emperor to abdicate and appoint his successor seems to be difficult and is also a battle against time.”

“Rather, it isn’t that easy to eliminate the neutrals. Aren’t there powerful nobles in the east and south?”

“... It’s very easy.”

“What?”

“You see, for the Gaillarde Garden’s Alliance to switch from neutrals to Auguste’s faction, it isn’t that hard, right?”

At that moment, Eleanor fell into deep thoughts.

She then drank the wine in her hand in one shot.

“Fufufu, indeed, we have the card of supporting other candidates, but do not forget that if prince Auguste is to succeed the throne, victory will be decided.”

“Of course.”

“Is there anything that you’re unsatisfied with?”

“... I still do not know what’s Latreille is scheming… Laying down countermeasures under such situation, I’m not very used to it.”

“If tricked, you just need to trick them back. You will lose once you’re unable to come up of a countermeasure. Isn’t that what being a strategist is?”

The words Eleanor said seemed to be directed to herself.

Regis fell into deep thoughts after hearing this.

He then drank his wine in a shot.

“... … Indeed… There’s no one that is omniscient, we can only react to changes now.”

“Well, that’s right. That reminds me, Regis.”

“Yes?”

“How about 10 times your salary? Think about it.”

“Ha,haha… If this goes on, Her Highness Argentina will be angry. Well, it’s about time for me to go. The wine is very delicious, thank you.”

Regis moved towards the hall after bowing.

——The preparation I made should have been within Latreille’s calculation.

The role of a strategist is to prepare and predict what comes next. Hence, if we go on the offensive, we will not need to worry about losing due to being unable to come up with countermeasures. Before sending the troops, there is a need to prepare, consider, thinking in the enemies’ shoes, before there is any victim…

“I don’t know…”

This word is something I cannot say as a strategist.

10 o’clock in the night.

The banquet in the palace was still going on.

I’m sure it will only end the next morning.

Currently, Altina and Regis was with Clarisse in the room as they left the banquet at 8. There shouldn’t be any troubles tonight, Eric is also on alert too...

Regis continued to wear the ceremonial clothes and went to Latreille’s room alone.

——It’s as if I’m entering a tiger’s den.

The owner of the room was leaning against a chair that was covered in fine leather, his elbow was on top of the mahogany table.

His gleaming golden hair was swaying around

Hearing Regis entering, Latreille’s red eyes looked towards Regis.

“Fuhaha, nervous?”

“... Of course, I’m just a 5th grade admin officer. Not once have I thought I will get an audience with the commander-in-chief.”

“Germain told me that you think lightly of yourself.”

“My ability isn’t that good, I do not even know if I can accomplish the job Her Highness gave me. If the strategist is someone else who is more outstanding, I believe the situation now will be better.”

“For example, the incident in which Argentina attacked me?”

“... Please do not make this kind of joke.”

After yesterday night, Latreille should know Altina’s ambition.

After all, it was a loud declaration.

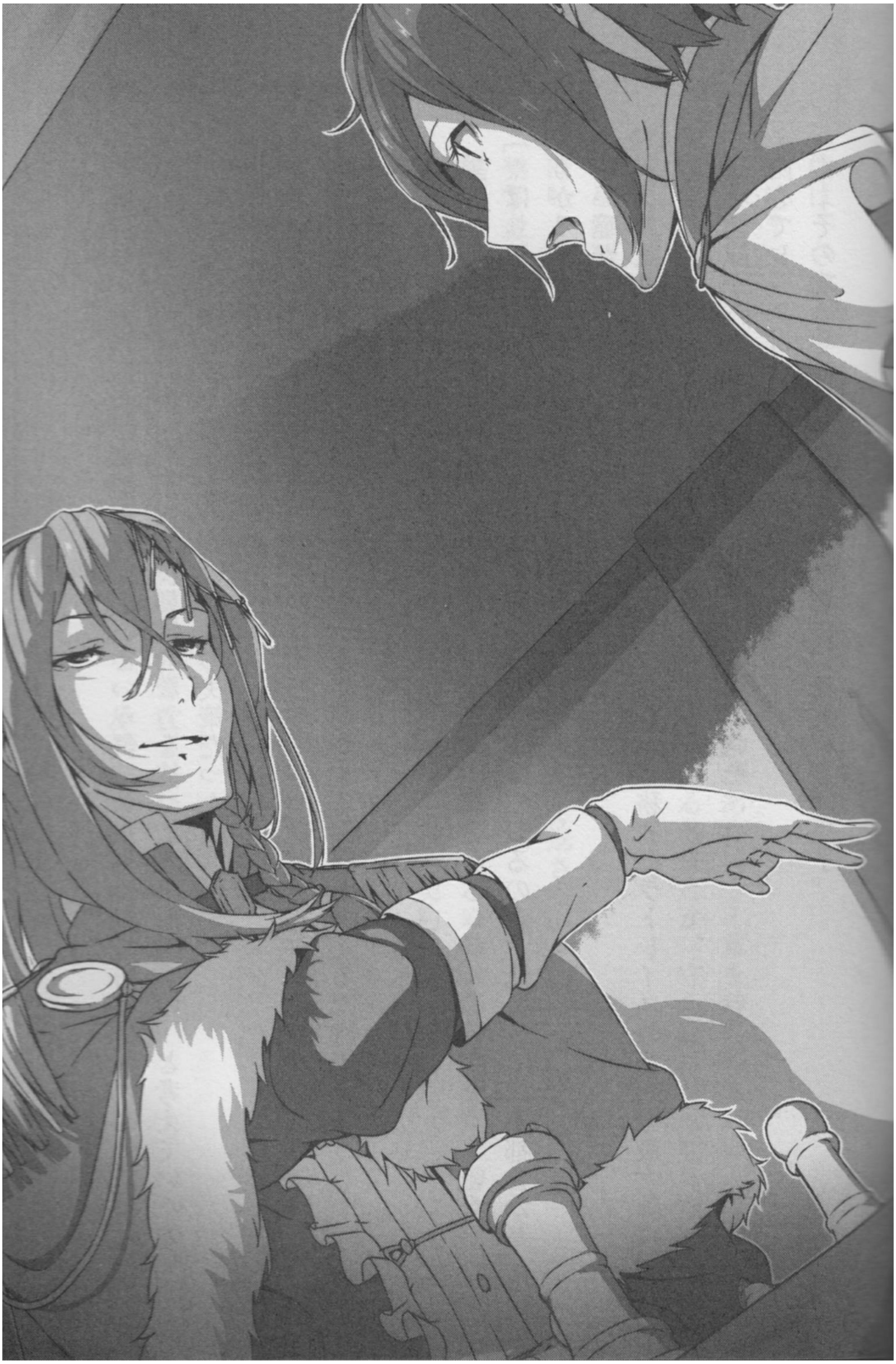
Even so, Regis was trying his best to hide Altina’s ambition.

Altina should have said this declaration at a more suitable timing and place.

On the table in front of Latreille was a chess set. Without saying anything, he moved the white pawn to d4.

“The idea of Argentina being my consort isn’t as bad as I imagined. That girl should have considered before… … Unless you are planning to invade the capital with the border’s regiment?”

Finishing his words, Latreille signaled to Regis to move.



Regis moved the black pawn to d5.

“Of course not, we never once thought of attacking the capital.”

“Originally, I won’t think of that too, but there are always unexpected incidents.”

“... It won’t happen.”

Although Regis denied Latreille’s conjecture, he still felt a little uneasy.

Altina whose ambition was to become the ruler won her authority at the borders by defeating Jerome who was the former commander.

Following that was the invasion by the barbarians. Due to the need for military strength, they formed diplomatic relation with the barbarians.

Once that was settled, an unreasonable order came from capital, ordering them to capture Volk Fortress.

Compared to before, Altina’s forces was greatly strengthened. Did Altina not once harbour thoughts of attacking the capital?

Latreille then moved his knight to f3, while the Regis moved his knight to f6.

Regis shook his head to shake off that thought.

Because a war will result in many people dying, Altina definitely will not want to see that happen.

“Her Highness does not wish for a civil war.”

“I see.”

Clack, clack. The blunt sound was resounding again

Both sides were positioning their pieces.

“The Beilschmidt border regiment had always been obeying the order from the capital, isn’t it?”

“If I knew that there is a strategist like you there, I would not have used this method.”

“... Is it fine to say that out loud?”

“What do you think about it?”

Latreille revealed a grin.

Hearing this, Regis’ hand trembled and dropped the bishop in his hand.

“W,what do you mean?”

“Using Volk Fortress as a base, the Beilschmidt border regiment ignored the protocol of the empire and increased their military forces without authorization. Argentina who gained more power returned triumphantly to the capital and discussed military affairs with me. What she was advocating was pulling back the front lines and cutting military budget.”

This was indeed part of what Regis planned.

Latreille’s queen managed to capture the black rook.

Regis seemed to groan a little.

If this goes on, it will be tough. However, if successful, it will change the tide of war.

Not only is it the time to go on the offensive, there’s also the need to come up with countermeasures against his tactics.

Regis moved his king to a position that was easy to protect.

“I can’t go against Her Highness’ decision.”

“I’m aware of Argentina wanting to change this nation. However, due to her being straightforward, once she has power, she will do things without consideration. However, I miscalculated as I never expected an outstanding strategist like you beside her.”

“... What are you trying to say.”

“The nosy nobles will not turn a blind eye to Argentina returning. Right now, the other forces are busy, should some unexpected event happen, she will be able to successfully increase her military strength.”

“... …”

Regis being cautious, did not say anything.

The black bishop and knight was also captured. On the board, Regis’ pieces was getting lesser.

“As I thought, it’s because Argentina has you as strategist? Isn’t it better for you to come to my side?”

Latreille’s eyes were fixed on Regis.

As Regis was a soldier, he was in the control of the military. In the military, no one could oppose Latreille’s words.

Hence, they have the right to transfer an admin officer from the borders.

Regis muttered in his heart.

——I already predicted you will use this card, Your Highness Latreille.

“I’m not that fixated in the military as you think, Your Highness.”

“What?”

“... If ordered to do something that I’m unwilling or uncomfortable with… I can always choose to quit, I’m not a prince nor a noble… I don’t have any family reputation or rules compelling me to stay in the military either.”

“I see, so you have that kind of position.”

“Yes, what the military rules means to me is just whether I can receive the scholarship from the Military Academy.”

“So it’s for the scholarship…”

To Regis who was not that well-connected, the system allowed him to borrow money for his living expense and school fees. However, he was not allowed to leave the military until he paid his debt.

“Actually, a lot of things happened, in the end, Her Highness loan me some money.”

“The money was loaned?”

“Yes, however, no matter what, I will repay the debt by working at Volk Fortress…”

This was from a book.

——"The heroic tales of Sylvania's attic hero" by Donatien Marqui Etna.

The story was about a soldier accomplishing great achievements by proposing tactics and married the princess in the end.

However, the servant who did the work was not the debt-filled commoner, but was a cat with boots that slept in the attic.

Latreille gave a wry smile.

“Indeed, if you aren’t a soldier, no matter what you do, I do not have power over you.”

“Yes.”

“In that case, it’s possible for you to stay in the capital.”

“... I’m quite a coward, I’m afraid of how my current colleague will punish me.”

“I see, then I have nothing to say anymore.”

It seemed that Latreille gave up on recruiting Regis.

Moreover, on the chessboard, the black pieces were in an advantageous position, dividing the white pieces who were lured into two.

The situation was reversed, the black pieces occupied the centre of the board, surrounding the white king.

While Regis’ king was in a better position and unable to be surrounded.

Latreille looked at the board, his hand slowly stopped and was clenching his teeth.

“Erm… … … Well… It’s not a big deal.”

“It’s just a game.”

“An order will reach in a few days time, this is also what Argentina wanted —— Regis Auric will be promoted from 5th grade to 3rd grade admin officer.”

Hearing this, Regis swallowed the words that were about to come out.

It was within his expectations.

Although the promotion seemed too much, but there was no reason to decline.

The promotion meant that there was not only remuneration, there was also more responsibility. This was the same as a demotion, there was no rights to choose.

“I understand… I accept this promotion”

“Is there anything you are unsatisfied with?”

“If I want to continue being a soldier, I believe that this promotion does not fit my status…”

“If the nation’s 3rd grade admin officers and above are as outstanding as you, that will mean the Empire is filled with talents. That way, I will have more time to take an afternoon nap and play some chess.”

Regis was racking his brain in a panic.

Even though he won the chess match, Regis’ heart was still pounding fast. Just returning with the news of the promotion would be a loss for us.

I cannot just go offensive on just the chess.”

“... Your Highness Latreille, is it because of the princess that you are paying so much attention to me?”

“That’s also part of the reason, but the main reason is that once I become the emperor, having capable strategist serving me is a good thing. Otherwise, how can the nation win the war in the future?”

Regis’ confidence was shaken upon hearing these words.

It seemed like Latreille was absolutely confident about succeeding the throne.

Eleanor should be preparing now as well.

If there were no accidents, the numerous nobles who support Auguste would welcome the three days long anniversary.

Under the situation that the emperor had yet to name his successor, Latreille should not have those eyes of a winner.

“As I suspected… You have a countermeasure against the Gaillarde Garden’s Alliance. It may even be that those nobles supporting Prince Auguste is also part of your plan.”

“Eh~ What exactly is it?”

The neutrals who had some power joined Auguste’s faction.

More people were supporting the third faction, Altina’s faction.

Although there were still nobles that had yet to show allegiance, but it was lesser compared to before.

Regis reassessed the complicated situation.

The problem was what Latreille was plotting...

Regis could not find an answer no matter how he thought.

Latreille rang his handbell.

Germain opened the door from outside.

“Good work.”

It seems that the time is up

Although I did not get the intelligence I wanted, there is still some gains. Both Latreille and Regis have this thinking.

“... As such, I got to go.”

“Okay, I will leave Argentina to you. She need to understand the nature of nation’s military and make a better choice.”

Those who surrendered to the Empire without any condition would be given a status befitting them.

However, once the war started, people who surrendered then will either be given a death sentence or exiled.

“... … I will tell her that for you.”

Regis left Latreille’s private room after bowing.

“Well, did you successfully persuade Sir Regis?”

After it was just the two of them, Germain who was beside Latreille asked that.

Latreille was still fiddling with the chess pieces on the board.

“Well, it’s as you said, he is quite clever, be it chess or his loyalty.”

“Yes, I heard from the juniors in the Military Academy that he is quite capable.”

“That I have experienced, however, it seems that he hasn’t notice our strategy and was probing me… Hahaha, I wonder who taught him that!”

Latreille revealed a smile after that.

This was an expression that even Germain who was his closest aide seldom saw.

“Ensure the communication line is maintained with the person at brother's side. Tomorrow morning, we will start our preparation in the capital.”

Latreille said this with confidence.

Germain put his hand on the table.

“Everything is proceeding smoothly, Your Highness Latreille.”

“Is that so?”

“Perhaps Milord is feeling uneasy?”

“... I do not deny that.”

“There will be no problem, please trust me.”

Hearing this, Latreille pressed his hand on top of Germain’s hand.

“Of course, I always trusted you.”

“I believe that for the nation’s future, Milord being the next emperor is required.”

“I’m made my resolve to do so.”

Germain firmly believed that only Latreille could save Belgaria which was on the verge of death.

Latreille was in a trance looking at the board, not saying anything.

Chapter 4 - The Silver Princess

On the third day of the anniversary——

After a light breakfast, the silver-haired Auguste left his room to begin preparing for the banquet.

He wore his military uniform.

“... That… Do I need to act like a sick person?”

A tiny voice resounded.

Lilim, who was Auguste’s maid, turned her head.

“Of course, people will be suspicious if you are too lively.”

Lilim was an outstanding maid, however she looked like a child and was rather short. Auguste looked at her while making his bed.

Auguste sat like a girl, with his legs bent 90 degrees.

Eddie who just fixed his hair sat on the sofa, looking into the distance

“Isn’t it fine to be a bit lively? If we are to report to the emperor now, the chance of asking for the commander-in-chief position is higher if you look healthier.”

Auguste nodded and said.

Lilim raised her brows.

“Is that so? Shouldn’t one be more careful as the important day draws near?... It will be bad if someone sees through us.”

“... Well.”

Auguste lowered his head.

Perhaps he was feeling nervous.

Eddie said confidently..

“There’s not going to be any problems, no one is going to notice it if it’s Felicia. After so long, she should be quite experienced, no?”

“... … Well… … Thank you, Eddie.”

The one who revealed a wry smile was Felicia, who was acting as Auguste now.

In other words, the person called Auguste here was actually his sister, 5th princess Felicia Six Celia de Belgaria.

This happened last July——

The real Auguste coughed blood while having his dinner, till now he had yet to wake up.

Auguste’s mother, Catherine, declared that it was a poisoning attempt. The imperial physician felt that the probability of poisoning was high after looking at Auguste.

Felicia was heartbroken and could not stop crying.

Catherine then ordered the physician.

“Remove Auguste’s clothes.”

“Eh, Yes…”

“Felicia.”

Sob “... Yes mother, i,is there anything?”

“Put on Auguste’s clothes.”

“Eh? What are you saying?”

“Answer me loudly, do you not feel angry? To see the one who poisoned your brother sits on the throne, do you not hate Latreille?”

“T,that…”

“Put on Auguste’s clothes immediately and temporarily announce that you are undergoing recuperation. Within that time, I will teach you how to act.”

Catherine was an actress before she became a concubine.

Due to Trouin House prestige, she was chosen to be the main lead and impressed the emperor with her acting skill.

Felicia used about two weeks to impersonate Auguste perfectly.

Only trustworthy attendants were carefully selected and educated thoroughly.

Felicia also chose an attendant born in the Hispania empire called Eliana.

Her eyes were like a pair of beautiful black pearls.

On the other hand, Felicia’s eyes were red, just like the other royalty.

Elaine disguised herself as Felicia, and used the excuse of contacting an eye disease to recuperate at House Trouin.

They were currently in a villa that was near the sea.

To see such a beautiful scenery was rare to most.

Six months had past since then.

Felicia stayed in the villa all the time as she was afraid that her identity would get exposed. It was akin to prison to her.

Then came Eddie who said “I will protect you”.

Felicia hugged Eddie..

It was as if Felicia had gotten more courageous from him.

With the help of the virtuous maid with a childlike appearance, Lilim, the work that the prince was supposed to do was settled with a rather good result.

After which, they initiated a visit to a woman from the southern Duke house ——Eleanor.

The New Nobles will support us if we promise to move the capital when we inherit the throne.

If we successfully obtain the throne, there will no longer be any fear of assassination.

At that point, we will be able to remove Latreille's military authority.

Even Prince Auguste will have some ambition.

Felicia stared blankly into the mirror.

This room was like a cage. However, Felicia who was locked inside was unlike those weak characters portrayed in stories. Those who looked at her would think she was Belgaria's first prince.

"I am…the first prince Carlos Liam Auguste de Belgaria… Lilim, your worries are unnecessary, I'm still required to act a bit sick."

"Y,yes… Your Highness Auguste."

Seeing Felicia acting like this, Eddie swallowed his saliva in fear.

Ever since young, the siblings relation was good, hence Felicia was clear about Auguste's behaviour. Therefore, not many people could see the difference. Recently, her acting had reached the point that it was frightening.

"How frightening… It's as if you are Auguste himself. What a superb acting skill."

"Well… When we are at the venue, call me 'Your Highness", Eddie."

"Yeah."

Regis was changing his clothes at the designated room.

Nothing happened for the past few there, nor was there any decisive information.

Hence, the third day approached.

“... In the end, I still can’t find the last piece to the puzzle.”

“Is this also Latreille’s scheme?”

For some unknown reason, Eric’s back was facing Regis and his face that was slightly turned to the side was red.

That reminds me, I have never seen Eric changing in front of others.

He always said that he is going to wipe his body, hence going to the room. When he came out, he already changed.

Moreover, whenever Regis changed in front of him, he would avert his gaze.

Although I’ll be troubled if he stares at me, but this is way too strange.

“Eric… Are you perhaps…”

“Erm... Regis!”

“Eh? Yes?”

“Erm… There’s a chance that prince Auguste isn’t a male.”

“... What make you think that way?”

“Ah, no. Although I have no evidence, but…”

Eric hesitated.

“... An imperial physician will confirm the gender when a royalty was born. Moreover, physicians from the queen’s faction and the neutral faction were also there, so there shouldn’t be any mistake.”

“T,that’s true.”

“However, it only happens when he was born. Right now, prince Auguste gender is being questioned.”

“... I’m not very clear about what Auguste did. H,however, Altina said that something is weird regarding him.”

Was it from that time?——

Altina revealed a puzzled look that time

“Haven't you become smaller?”

“H,how is that even possible! How unreasonable.”

“Also, your voice seems higher pitched.”

Eddie answered this for Auguste.

“That, Argentina… After Auguste had fallen sick, a lot of things happened.”

Regis hung the golden accessory on his chest.

“Compared to Altina and Auguste, I’m more interested in the actions of the bodyguard Eddie.”

“Why?”

“If that Auguste is the real one, then the bodyguard will not need to separate them, no?”

“Ah…”

Eric suddenly turned pale.

Regis hung his sword at the waist.

“... Did you notice anything?”

“That… the sword is in the wrong direction, it should be slightly above the side of the body.”

“Oh~?!”

Regis quickly corrected it.

Eric slowly moved away from the chair.

“Well… … As a commoner, you are quite knowledgeable about the nobles. In that case, do you know what will happen if a house does not have any male heir?”

“...That, is it related to the Blanchard house? Or is it someone else?”

Eric thought for awhile before shifting his eyes away.

“In general, what do you think will happen?”

“In that case… I know these rules because I’m an admin officer. If it is a girl, it’s likely that she will be married to the second or third child of other houses.”

“Although it’s them entering the house, but a house tradition and custom is decided by the man of the house. Even if there’s a heir, they can’t inherit their tradition, so their bloodline practically ended.”

“I see.”

“Someone at a certain place disagree with this and does not wish for such thing to happen.”

Eric had already made his words clear as he said it without hesitation. Looks like he have his own troubles too.

“... Well… Is this related to someone you know?”

“Yes… … Someone that I’m familiar with… Precisely because of that, I believe that I should understand what will happen if such things occurs.”

There was sweat at the agitated Eric’s neck.

I roughly understand what he meant.”

Inside of his brain, Regis dug out a book he once read.

Regis understood why Eric was so bothered after meeting Auguste.

“... I see, so it’s someone else.”

In Belgaria, there were many kinds of people living here.

However, only the royalty have ruby pupils.

At the very least, Regis did not see anyone else having red pupils. There were rumours about non-royalty having red pupil, but it was quickly proven to be a gimmick.

Eric adjusted his uniform at the chest area

His smooth throat could be seen clearly.

“Looks like such gender issues happen everywhere.”

“Nn… That’s true... Prince Auguste has been sick for 23 years, and yet, after vomiting blood and collapsing, he recovered in half year to the point of handling government affairs without any problem, isn't that a little weird?

“Indeed.”

“Although some say that the royalty have a better recovery ability. When Altina fractured her wrist, the doctor said it will take three month to recover, but...

“That’s true.”

Regis was looking through the bookcase for an answer inside his brain.

Among the innumerous stories related to the palace, where are the stories similar to this...

“... … Ah, So that’s the case.”

“Regis?”

Regis nodded his head as he was sure of it. Hence he lay a piece of paper on the table, it was a letter.

Regis was immersed in his book as Eric’s words was not reaching him.

“... Rumours about some royalty being a fake are not rare. However, if such things are true, there are too little benefits… Well, even if stories related to the palace are rare, there should be one or two such incidents.”

Regis took out ink and quill pen and began writing.

Eric seemed to relax a little.

“If it’s Regis, no matter what happens, there’s a feeling that you will do something about it. How remarkable.”

“I just happen to know… However, it will be funny if the emperor decides to name his successor on a whim during the banquet tonight. If that happens, the schemes that each faction came up with will burst like a bubble.”

“Indeed, that will be intriguing then.”

“... … This will feel like a bad comedy in which people will not be able to laugh. After all, it is a political struggle.”

Regis finished writing the letter.

“Is there anything wrong?”

“I will leave the preparation here to you. Also, please pass that letter to Abidal Evra who is outside the palace, it is essential to my plan.”

“I understand.”

“... … I’m sorry, the plan this time cannot be changed. Hence, don’t die.”

“I understand, I will come back alive.”

Their next meeting could be in Sierck fortress, hence they both gave a wry smile.

Following that, Regis synchronised his watch with the clock on the wall.

“Looks like there’s still plenty of time… There’s no need to panic now.”

Regis sat on a chair and began reading. This was how he spent his time while waiting for Altina to finish her make-up.

“You look quite confident, Regis.”

“Your words are too exaggerated. I have been thinking all the time that I haven’t packed anything. This book originally is to be kept away, but I took it out to read.”

“I see.”

Eric put the letter inside an envelope and kept it properly.

After that, he checked his clothes before heading out.

“Ahh… Right, Eric.”

“Yes?”

“That… about the girl that was mentioned just now…”

“I,is there anything about it?”

Eric replied while feeling uneasy.

Although nothing was mentioned, the Eric was restless.

Although Regis understood this, this was still unexpected news for him. However, he was not a blabbermouth.

“... Although it’s your acquaintance's problem... … Considering that even marrying to other nobles is not going to help her… … Isn't marrying someone that respect her and her family tradition another option?”

Regis said while looking at Eric.

Eric’s hand which was about to open the door stopped.

“I,is that so… If there is someone like that, I will definitely grasp the opportunity.”

“I see.”

“Someone that respect traditions and willingly to marry into the house… Moreover, grandparents will not object this… If there’s really someone like that…“

“Think about it once the mission is successful.”

“I will, Regis!”

Eric gazed at Regis with warm eyes.

Does Regis know about it? Having such thoughts, Eric felt like probing Regis out.

One hour later ——

The banquet was about to start immediately.

Regis, Altina and one more person was going to a certain room.

“I hope that they haven’t left yet…”

“We will know once we knock on the door.”

Altina who answered knocked on the door without any hesitation.

——Well, it will be weird if she hesitated in going to her brother’s room.

Regis despised himself for having having such thoughts because they were entering a royalty’s room.

After waiting for awhile.

There was no response.

“They have already left?”

“If that’s the case, won’t it be troublesome if you discuss this at the banquet?”

Just as he finished his sentence, the door opened.

The person who looked out was Eddie.

“What, it’s just you, Argentina. For a second I thought it was bandits again.”

“It’s impossible for a robbery to occur in the palace, okay? Well, in a sense, there are people that are no different from bandits.”

“What do you mean?”

“Auguste is inside, right? Let’s talk inside the room.”

After considering the situation, Eddie let Altina and the rest enter.

The interior of the room was not only vast, but also beautiful. It was even possible to host a small banquet here.

Dressing table, work desk and sofa, it was well furnished.

There was a door inside that lead to the next room. This design was the same as Altina’s room, hence that should be the bedroom.

Inside the room was Eddie in his military uniform, equipped with Defendre Sept and a young maid.

And of course, Auguste who was in his ceremonial clothes.

“Argentina, do you have any business with me?”

“I came precisely because I have business with you.”

Aside from Regis and Altina who came here, there was still someone with a cloth cap covering the face, making them unable to recognise the person.

Auguste and the rest were also aware of this person.

Auguste glared at them.

“Although we are siblings… … However, for you to have the guts to hide your face with the cap, isn’t it a bit disrespectful in front of a royalty?”

“You can remove it now. I only met this person on the way here, I brought her here because I have never seen her once in the palace. You should understand this quite clear.”

Altina reached for that person’s cap and slowly removed it.

Regis was at one corner observing Auguste’s expression.

Auguste, Eddie and the maid was looking at that person closely.

The hair that was hidden by the cap was revealed.

What was revealed was locks of beautiful silver hair.

What was hidden behind the cap was a young girl with beautiful silver hair reaching to her chest.

The girl's eye area was bandaged.

Because she was looking down, one could only see her hair, but not her expression.

Auguste swallowed his saliva.

Eddie looked at Auguste with unease.

The maid was watching Regis carefully.

Their reaction is just as I expected.

At this point, Regis began to talk.

"... … This person claimed to be the 5th princess Felicia Six Celia de Belgaria that is supposed to be at the Trouin House's villa recuperating. For some reason, I feel that she and princess Felicia are two different people."

At this point, this person with her eyes covered was slowly bending her knee. Her shoulders were shaking, saying something in a timid voice.

"P,please forgive me, I was unable to do anything"

Auguste paled.

Eddie's right hand reached for his sword

Altina also reacted by extending her right hand, however she was wearing the clothes for banquet tonight.

Hence she reached for the sword at Regis' waist.

"Eddie, are you intending to draw the sword in the palace?"

"To actually hear something decent like this from you, Argentina."

“I’m always growing.”

“... … Everyone, please calm down.”

It would be troublesome if Altina and Eddie began fighting. That way, they would not be able to achieve their objective, nor would the victory bring them any benefits.

Regis’ sword was a normal sword from the military, compared to Eddie’s Defendre Sept, it would break after one clash.

Before this tension intensified, Regis looked for Auguste.

“... Does Your Highness think that this girl here is Felicia?”

“Well…”

Auguste lowered his head to look at the person that claimed to be Felicia.

While Regis nodded and said.

“She is princess Felicia after all?”

“T,that…”

Felicia who was acting as Auguste paled.

Eddie was gritting his teeth.

At this moment, the maid moved in front of Regis and the rest.

“What is your motive?”

“... You are?”

“I’m His Highness’ maid, Lilim.”

To be able to speak firmly under such situation.

So that’s it, Regis thought.

“... Based on my investigation, be it prince Auguste or princess Felicia, they both do not have much interests in politics and economics. Sir Eddie is the same, he always stayed by the princess side. However, recently, prince Auguste managed to solve all troublesome work beautifully.”

As Regis was talking, he looked at the maid.

Brown skin with black hair tied into a knot at the back.

The black eyes that was mixed with some red glared at Regis without fear.

“... You are the advisor, right?”

“Looks like I have no other option after what you said. Indeed, when there are troubles, I will help out.”

“... I have also looked into the details of prince Auguste. No matter how tough the problem was, it will always be settled. To think that it was actually a young girl, how remarkable.”

“Ha?! Nothing will come out of praising me.”

Lilim’s face was red.

“My apologies for saying such impetuous words.”

Regis signalled the girl by putting his hand on her

“It’s fine now.”

“Ara, it just ended like this?”

“... What a superb acting skill. Originally, you were suppose to just kneel down without saying anything.”

“Ara ara, is that so?”

The girl removed the bandage on her eyes and the wig.

The girl in front of them right now was someone with brown eyes and hair.

She bowed politely once more, different from her previous attitude.

“I’m Her Highness Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria’s maid, Clarisse. I’m prepared for the consequences for my brazen actions earlier.”

“What?!”

Felicia was momentarily speechless.

Regis lowered his head.

“My apologies for shocking you. Please forgive us for our action, as there’s a reason behind it.”

“You… What are you scheming?"

Felicia asked with a flustered and confused look.

Altina, Eddie and Lilim looked at Regis.

“... I believe that these advantageous position you believe you are holding are within prince Latreille’s scheme.”

“Latreille, he…”

Felicia was agitated after hearing this, only to calm down after some time.

Eddie tilted his head.

“Well, um, that is, what is going on, Argentina?”

“Eddie, you aren’t that smart since long ago~”

“Are you trying to say that I’m dumb?”

“I wonder~ You see, even I understand after hearing that just now.”

“Hey!…”

Putting aside Eddie, Regis’ shoulder dropped.

“If you just explain it properly…”

However, Lilim was pointing at Clarisse and said,

“In other words, Latreille is aware that Her Highness Felicia was acting as prince Auguste all along. Moreover, it is due to a certain silver-haired person telling him.”

“No… not just anyone… Do you not think of the person acting as Felicia leaked this??”

“Impossible! Eliana should still be in the villa!”

“Anyone can just research a little and know Her Highness Felicia’s home. Even the eye disease that requires the victim to bandage the eyes have been reported in the weekly news for the past few years. Even the books that the royalty collect have it… Just that they do not know who was the one acting as Felicia.”

“Eh? It’s recorded in the book?”

“If you go to the bookshops in the capital, there will be plenty of them.”

Lilim shaked her head and said,

“Even so, why are you so sure this is part of Latreille’s scheme? What if this isn’t his scheme? Perhaps Latreille isn’t aware of this at all, am I wrong?”

Of course, everything was only a possibility

However, evidence said otherwise.

“...The old nobles govern the western area of the empire, hence the west has no civil war and is quite stable. However, the second army was sent there, although it’s not the first army, it is strong enough to suppress a massive civil war… Prince Latreille’s aide, Germain’s brothers, brothers of the Beaumarchais House, are the commanders of the second army.

“It could be just a coincidence?”

“Furthermore, the Trouin family did not attend the banquet for the past two days. Right, perhaps they were delayed by some event? For example, having their mansion surrounded by the second army and such.”

“How is that possible?!”

Felicia shouted.

Felicia who had listened closely to the conversation since the start began to crying. Anyone who saw this would feel heartbroken too.

Even so, it’s inevitable since it’s part of the plan.

“... I have checked the namelist, the Trouin house indicated that they will attend on the first day. You can send someone to contact them to check whether I’m lying or not.”

Lilim sighed like a child.

“It’s impossible to contact them, because reaching the Trouin house will require at least 10 days.”

“What about the 2nd concubine?”

“The 2nd concubine had returned to the main house, she originally indicated that she will attend this anniversary festival.”

“... … Doesn’t that mean that she wasn’t here for the 6th concubine wedding?”

“Yes.”

Lilim nodded.

Altina suddenly shouted upon hearing this.

“That’s apparent! Even if he’s the emperor, to marry another woman, how is it possible for her to congrats him!!”

Felicia and Clarisse also nodded in agreement.

Although these words were not directed at Regis and Eddie, the males here were also taken back by their responses.

“T,that… In any case… Something happened to the Trouin house. Isn’t it too naive for you to continue thinking that the second army isn’t part of Latreille’s scheme?”

Lilim drooped her shoulders.

“Be it the movement of the 2nd army or the commanders of the army that are under prince Latreille, I am not even aware of it.”

“... That can’t be help, this is something only those who belong to the military will know.”

“I understand. I will assume that prince Latreille is aware of Prince Auguste’s true identity”

“... … Even before this, it is likely that Latreille is already aware of this. During that time when Argentina met you in the capital, she already felt something is off.”

“Eh?”

Felicia looked at Altina with a face that was teary eyes.

Altina confirmed with a nod.

“Well, it might be wrong to speak ill of Auguste who had apparently passed on, but his personality is actually quite twisted. He always called me as ‘child of that commoner’.”

“H,how is that possible… Elder brother, he…”

“That started since young? However, as he grew up, he stopped using that. However, because of that reason, never once did I call him elder brother.”

Remembering that time when they coincidentally met——

Altina waved to her brother and said,

“Elder brother, see you later during dinner.”

“Nn, be careful.”

Auguste nodded his head.

The two sides walked pass each other.

Towards the unusual way of calling, Auguste did not seem to have any reaction at all.

“I won’t believe it if someone else said it. I only began to suspect when Regis told me that someone else might be impersonating Auguste.”

“I,is that so… …we never seem to play together at all, hence I wasn’t aware of it…”

Felicia said while her face was still full of tears.

Altina gently stroked Felicia’s silver hair and said,

“Well, I always see you in the house… … I’m sorry, I should have played with you in the house that time.”

Eddie also began reminiscencing. After some time, he suddenly slammed his fist on his palm.

“Ahh, that reminds me, you really never called him ‘elder brother’ before.”

“Eddie is really slow!”

Lilim commented, causing the despondent Eddie to put his hand on his knee.

Altina waved and said,

“It can’t be help. After all, Eddie is more dumb than me.”

“Ku~... … I’m unable to refute that this time!”

Regis pulled them back to the topic

“... … In any case, Latreille is already aware that this Auguste is a fake for quite some time. However, no one will believe him without any evidence. Moreover, they have plenty of ways to leave the palace by making use of his disease as an excuse.”

“If such a thing really happened, I would have done exactly that.”

If he just escaped like this and waited till the emperor died, Auguste would inherit the throne due to the order of succession.

“... To Latreille, evidence is necessary. On the other hand, having evidence to prove that this Auguste is a fake, it will become his trump card. He will definitely use this trump card at the appropriate time to gain the maximum benefits… And the best time to use it is the banquet tonight.”

“How frustrating, but… As expected of him… “

“... I feel that Latreille is just plain greedy and ambitious.”

“I,is that so?”

Towards Felicia’s suspicion, Regis could only nod his head.

“”Latreille not only has the trump card of exposing your true identity, he is also finding ways to eliminate the neutrals. By guiding the most powerful new nobles in the southern region, he's changing the 1st faction that supports prince Auguste.

“Ah.”

Felicia cried out aloud as she finally realised how frightening Latreille was.

Lilim muttered sullenly.

“Damn, if her identity is to be revealed, we will lose the power to fight against Latreille.”

Eddie suddenly walked over.

“There are no other options if that is the case. Latreille’s chance of winning in a war is quite high. More importantly, if your identity is exposed, you will be hanged for impersonating Auguste. If you want to escape, it has to be now.”

“Please wait!”

“Why are you stopping me? Do you not care what will happen to Felicia?”

“Even if you escape now, you will still be captured by the imperial soldiers and dealt as criminals.”

Eddie used his right hand to hold his sword.

“What about it? No matter who comes after us, I will protect Felicia. I will fulfil this promise!”

“E, Eddie…”

Felicia’s became red in an instant.

Altina and Lilim who were watching also blushed due to being embarrassed, while Clarisse only smiled.

To elope for love...

It’s a common plot in novels, however this must not happen.

Regis shook his head and said,

“... … If you are already resolved to escape, why not gamble on my strategy? Perhaps the outcome might be favourable to us.”

“Your strategy, is it?”

Eddie’s hand slowly moved away from his sword.

While Lilim closed in.

“Is this strategy better than escaping?”

“Of course.”

Regis looked towards the princess.

Here is the crucial part.

“... … Princess Felicia… … Do you not want to avenge your brother over the poisoning incident? Are you fine with letting the mastermind, Latreille, to just sit on the throne like this?”

The confused young girl in front of Regis nodded.

“Then what should I do?”

“I've been waiting for you to say that.”

Regis seemed like he had overcome an obstacle, revealing a smile.

Altina and Clarisse looked at each other

“... Hey, don’t you think that Regis’ face suddenly darkened? To actually show a sinister smile.”

“Your Highness, men always deceive women like this.”

“... It feels, terrifying.”

“... Indeed, in the end, the princess should just trust me, my princess~”

“... Ye,yeah?”

Before the princess was enveloped by the curse-like chant, Regis deliberately coughed.

That, Ms Clarisse, I feel like saying that I’m just doing a normal deal.

“It’s about time to explain the strategy.”

“Ah, okay!”

Altina suddenly straighten her posture.

On the other hand, Clarisse was smiling and withdrew from the crowd.

Regis began to explain his points to the 4 people.

The music that signaled that the banquet started could be heard from far.

“His Royal Highness, 1st prince of Belgaria, Carlos Liam Auguste de Belgaria, Her Royal Highness, 4th princess of Belgaria, Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria~”

The old butler announced.

The noisy hall was filled with nobles dressed in black.

Eddie and Regis also entered.

It was a strange sight to the nobles to see Auguste having an aura different from usual and Altina who stood beside him as if it was normal.

In front of Felicia who was acting as Auguste was Latreille.

Latreille noticed her and walked over while revealing a face as if he had won.

“Dear brother, are you feeling better?”

“The temperature today is fine, I’m feeling pretty good, Latreille.”

“Haha, that’s good then.”

Latreille should know that the one in front of him was actually Felicia. His conversation just now was a bit forced.

On the other hand, Altina who was beside them said softly,

“As I suspect, this style doesn’t fit you at all, Latreille.”

“Well… …”

“Hey, Latreille… … Did you really do something that you shouldn’t in my meal during last July?”

Altina looked at Latreille seriously.

Her fiery red hair and crimson eyes seemed to be emanating pressure.

Latreille was only silent.

“... These kind of people only believe that they are right. No matter how I explain, you’re most likely not going to change your opinion.”

“You only need to answer with a yes or no, you twisted man.”

“Well, you two are the only people that dare to criticise me like this.”

“Oh, is that so? I think that they also agree with us, just that they did not say it out.”

Auguste sarcastically remarked.

“As a royalty, those useless people’s evaluation means nothing to me. To not even understand this, how dumb.”

“Hmm, shouldn't we treat all who give us advise equally?”

Latreille tilted his glass slightly.

Altina raised her brows and said.

“Well~ My subordinate once told me that I’m reckless, imprudent, short tempered and thoughtlessness.”

“”Ah!””

The two princes had faces of disbelief. Well, one of them was a princess.

“Is that perhaps, Sir Jerome?”

Latreille asked, however, Altina shook her head.

“Ever since Jerome lost to me in a duel, I never heard him saying anything bad about me anymore. However, Regis kept saying it without any reservation.”

“So it’s that strategist.”

Latreille shifted his sight to a corner of the hall. Regis was talking to a beauty dressed in black dress at that corner.

Auguste revealed a look of unease.

“He, should just be commoner, right?”

“I think so.”

“Is he not afraid of receiving punishment for insulting a royalty?”

“I’m not sure, however, isn’t it fine this way?”

Latreille and Auguste showed a bewildered face.

“Maintaining strict discipline is the duty of the commander.”

“Love really is blind…”

“Eh!? Not that, what I’m trying to say is… … “

As Altina did not expect an attack from both of them, she seemed to be flustered.

Regis walked over with a glass of white wine in his hand.

“Greetings.”

“Oh, it’s you, Regis. Have you decided to come to my side?”

Eleanor slightly raised her glass of red wine and said. She was currently wearing a low-cut

Underneath the black dress was her pure white skin, her cleavage was also emphasised.

Regis shifted his gaze away forcibly and leaned his back against the wall before talking.

“... … As of right now, there’s no consideration for that.”

“However, perhaps your decision may change tomorrow. Soon, the 6th concubine will make her appearance.”

“... It seems that the ceremony’s department staffs are quite talkative.”

The queen has already appeared, the fight over who is the main wife is about to start. The queen should be moody now. That was as far as the intelligence could bring Regis to.

Eleanor sipped her wine.

The glass was stained with her red lipstick.

“Fufu, compared to our last meeting, my charisma has increase about 3 times.”

“The you right now is very charming.”

“Still, it seems that I’m no match for Her Highness Marie Quatre. After all, younger is better.”

“N,no, that isn’t the problem… I never looked at Her Highness in that way.”

Eleanor smiled.

“However, that princess thinks otherwise.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ahh~ I can’t wait to be with Regis tonight, that’s what I mean?”

“... … You mean chatting through the night? Indeed, I always fall asleep on the table… … Well, forget it. Right, it’s about the speech last time, is it possible to change the script a little?”

“Oya? To change my script?”

“... Er, how do I say it… There’s no need to edit your script, now, the best way is for you to follow my script.”

The smile on Eleanor’s face vanished.

What replaced the smile was a sharp gaze, causing Regis to perspire.

“What have you done, Regis.”

“... … Do you still remember the words that day? ‘If tricked, you just need to trick them back. You will lose once you’re unable to come up with a countermeasure’?”

“Of course.”

“I’m sorry… That was a lie, if I was tricked, I will plan for a withdrawal.”

“Ho~”

Regis slowly tilted his glass, drinking the white wine.

Even though it was not hot, Regis was drenched in sweat. If what he wore was not the military ceremonial clothes with accessories hanging all over him, he would have used his sleeve to wipe his sweat.

Regis looked at the stage.

“If it’s me… … Before preparing anything, I will think in the shoe of my opponents.”

“Fufu, to prepare your strategy after predicting your opponent’s move. It seems that you are rather good at it.”

“... … However, because of this, I’m unable to come up with a strategy if I can’t predict my opponent. In other words, predicting others is the role of a strategist. Even so, just predicting isn’t enough, it’s still a dead end if they cannot come up with a countermeasure.”

“So you mean that we merchants don't stake our lives?

“That isn’t what I mean… … The Tiraso Laverde House is quite famous in the world of business, hence you will understand how to gain by judging the profits and losses. Success and failure will determine your business, no? Till now, how many times have you encountered a failure that will result in you unable to make a come back and will also endanger your life?"

“Are you trying to fool me? You are still too young, Regis.”

Although Eleanor said it calmly, her face showed that she was impatient.

Her eyes glared at Regis, causing his feet to curl up.

Regis felt the same as encountering the wolf in the winter that time.

I see, so that’s how she got the nickname ‘Vixen of the South.”

Angering her was not Regis’ purpose. Leaving aside this, her assistance is required in the future. Hence, it’s necessary to come clean with her.

“... … … Following, I will come clean with you as a compensation for lying to you that time.”

“I accept your sincerity, however, do not take me as a fool. Speak, Regis, what did you do?”

“... … Eleanor, do you have a sense of dissonance regarding prince Auguste?”

“Indeed.”

Not denying…

It seems that there’s no meaning to beat around the bush.

It’s better to say it directly.

“The real identity of the prince Auguste… is actually Her Highness Felicia.”

“What?”

Eleanor involuntarily shouted.

Her eyes followed Regis closely.

The red liquid inside the glass was shaking in her hand.

“... Seeing this reaction, it seems that you are not aware of this. Not only this, the chances of prince Latreille having evidence to prove this is high.”

“No, that shouldn’t be. If prince Latreille really had evidence, he will already present it to eliminate him.”

“His goal is to make use of this trump card by causing the neutrals to quit Auguste’s camp. Hence, he is waiting for a situation where Auguste cannot escape nor justify himself. In other words, the timing is today, before the emperor…”

It seems Eleanor never thought that she was also a target

After the bad news, it’s time to give her some hope.

“Regis, you know about this?”

“It was this morning that I’m completely aware of this, with the help of my comrades.”

Eleanor suddenly staggered

Regis used his shoulder to support Eleanor and took her glass in a hurry.

“A,are you alright?”

“... How foolish… There’s no way I would be fine.”

“I will bring a chair over.”

Regis supported Eleanor to a waiter and asked “This person is drunk, is there a chair around?” Under the guidance of the waiter, they soon found a place to sit.

The two of them were resting on a couch at a corner.

As it was still early, the other couches were empty.

Eleanor was leaning against the seat while Regis was sitting on the couch next to her

Eleanor wore a silk glove, her hand was trembling. After some time, she clenched her hands tightly.

“This news… How am I going to explain to the nobles in the alliance and those who conduct business with us? Right now, we are opponents with Latreille… If he becomes the emperor, all of them will lose their standing. It will result in a big loss for them. No, it might even be worse than that.”

“... That will not happen.”

“Do not comfort me.”

“No, really, because I’m aware of this scheme.”

“What?”

“... Because I know it, I have an countermeasure for it. If you are willing to help me, I’m certain that it will work.”

Her breathe slowly returned to normal.

Her hands also stop trembling.

“Even when the prince is a fake and the opponent has evidence, even so, Regis, you have a countermeasure for it?”

“Erm, strictly speaking… it’s because of such situation that I have a countermeasure.”

Actually, I just read before about such situations in books.

Eleanor’s eyes were set on Regis.

“Those words are not just to fool me, right?”

“... Of course not, I will tell you my countermeasure. To me, your assistance is required. Hence, Eleanor, you are required to know my strategy.”

“Do explain.”

After confirming that there was no one around, Regis told Eleanor about the plan.

It’s not a complicated plan anyway.

On most part, it’s the same as what I told Auguste, Altina and the rest.

However, it’s necessary for the alliance to declare to others. Hence, contacting Eleanor and her grandfather is essential.

As Eleanor listened, she seemed to be relieved.

When Regis finished explaining, Eleanor was deep in thought.

She should be considering the feasibility of the plan.

“Well, looks like it’s a concrete plan. There’s nothing to be supplemented.”

“... … If I’m aware of this earlier, I should be able to come up with a more suitable plan. No matter what, the prelude to the show has already began.”

“I see, so this is what you mean by the ‘role of a strategy’. Indeed, If it was me, I will have no countermeasure."

"Although it's not what I originally want, I will be troubled if prince Latreille is to win."

"Well, I understand, I will aid you. However, there's something that needs to be changed."

"Where?"

"My grandfather in this aspect is not up to standard. He is desire-free, kind and somewhat timid."

According to Regis' script, the plan was to let Eleanor convince her grandfather to do the act.

"... Don't tell me that you are going to do it personally?"

"That's what I intend to do."

Eleanor closed her eyes and seemed to be thinking about something.

Don't tell me that she is considering another plan? Regis felt uneasy after such thoughts.

After a while, Eleanor opened her eyes and brought her face closer to Regis.

Regis was surprised by her action.

Before Regis could react, a beautiful white hand closed off his escape route.

"W,what are you trying to do?... "

"Well, I'm not obedient to the point I will just do your bidding. No matter what, I'm a 'vixen'."

Eleanor used her other hand to caress Regis' cheek.

"T,that… … There's people watching."

“Let them watch.”

“B,but I will be troubled by it.”

“Your plan will also succeed even without our help, right? I’m thankful that you came to tell us that. In the future, the Alliance will become the foundation of the 4th princess power. Hey, do you think the old western nobles will just retire from the chessboard?”

“I do not deny it.”

“You will be looked down if you do not accept a woman invitation.”

“Wait?! I?!”

Regis panicked at this situation from an erotic novel that fell over the chessboard.

"Leave everything to me."

Eleanor leaned her body on Regis.

Eleanor then kissed on Regis’ cheek, near his lips.

“Ah?!”

“Ah~”

He sounded like a timid mouse.

After a kiss, Eleanor swiftly removed her face. Her face was like when a fox was chasing a prey. She then shifted her sight to the hall.

Regis followed Eleanor and shifted his sight to the hall.

Altina seemed to be shocked seeing this while Felicia was red in the face.

The other nobles were also looking over here with curiosity.

Regis was a soldier with a commoner status. On the other hand, Eleanor was not only a maiden from a Duke house, but she was also married. These two people kissed in the public.

Eleanor licked her lips.

“Fufu, it’s just the cheek. The lips will be the final attack, Regis.”

Regis did not do any strenuous action, yet he also felt the same as when he ran from the bottom of the Volk Fortress to the highest floor. His heart was beating furiously.

“Haa… Haa… I do not understand what are you thinking, totally do not understand…”

“You look as timid as a rabbit, how cute.”

“Eleanor, what are you thinking…”

“They are coming”

Eleanor looked at the stage.

The grand music sounded loudly.

The old butler announced loudly.

“His Majesty, Emperor of Belgaria, Liam Fernandi de Belgaria and Her Highness, the 6th concubine, Johaprecia Octovia Fon Estaburg~”

Sound of applause resounded in the room.

Regis’ body stiffen.

This title, how many times has it appeared in stories, how many times have I heard it in conversation.

Belgaria, Emperor ——

The atmosphere right now was not the same as when they were watching a parade, but was as if they were listening to a speech.

Now, Regis was attending the same party as his majesty.

The emperor wore a red costume and slowly approached the throne to sit on it, he was a wrinkled old man with grey hair.

The young sixth concubine sat carefully on the seat next to him, her clothes were so dazzling that she seemed to be wearing jewels rather than clothes.

The emperor sat down.

There were no soldiers guarding him.

One could approach him without being arrested.

Regis stood up from the sofa immediately, and got in line with the nobles that wanted to greet the emperor and congratulate his health and the empire's anniversary.

Regis had a wry smile just thinking about it.

He, a commoner...

Was going to congratulate the emperor for his health and for the empire’s anniversary?

His head started to heat up and he cooled it down with his reason.

He couldn’t be swallowed by the atmosphere.

He was doing his job as Altina’s strategist in order to take that emperor’s throne.

He took a deep breath.

“Aah.”

“Huhu, don’t play dumb Regis.”

Eleanor poked the edge of her lips with the fingertip.

When he noticed the meaning of the gesture, Regis wiped his cheek hurriedly.

His hand was stained with a dark red color.

“Uaa… So you really did it, I don’t understand you at all miss Eleanor.”

“Huhu, because of your strategy, I have to stand before that cunning old fox and that young lion. It’s enough or would you like some more?”

“T-that’s...”

A real battle doesn’t go like chess.

The power struggles in the court are the same too.

Eleanor went ahead through the assembly hall like a soldier going to the front.

She didn’t look back anymore.

In the stead of the emperor who couldn’t raise his voice, the ceremony’s minister read loudly.

The emperor who was sitting on his throne raised his golden glass.

The nobles also raised their glass and shouted.

Long life to the Belgaria empire——

After that, they drank from their glass.

One by one, the nobles went on the stage to congratulate the emperor’s health and the anniversary of the empire.

It should have been a first come first serve basis, however, the powerful nobles just cut the queue like it was normal. The staffs from the ceremony’s department did their best to maintain order, but there were conflicts from both sides.

After the greetings and congratulations——

On the stage was Felicia disguised as Auguste.

Eddie was beside her.

At the side of the stage, Altina and Eleanor seemed to be talking over something.

Should I go over and check what they are discussing about? Regis was very worried—— to the point that he forgotten the lipstick stain was still on his cheek.

On the other side of the stage was Latreille and the rest. Beside Latreille were Germain and two other soldiers. They should be Germain's brothers.

Beside Latreille was a woman dressed in white robe.

This person appearance was like when Clarisse was impersonating Felicia, just that she slightly shorter. Her actions also seemed weird, she should be the real impersonator.

Her name should be Eliane.

If Latreille was to put her on the stage, then Auguste will not be able to prove his innocence.

In the worst scenario—— the old western nobles and the New Nobles from the Alliance will lose their prestige and power, Latreille will be able to gradually ascend the throne.

This should be the so-called trump card of his.

The hall was surrounded tightly by the imperial guards. Using force here seemed to be impossible.

Unless Latreille chose not to use this card, there was no way Regis and the others could make it through this.

Auguste greeted the emperor on the stage.

"Father's health is the thing most worth celebrating in this year anniversary."

"Well, that's right."

The emperor nodded and said.

Before this was the nobles greetings. the emperor seemed to be just nodding his head. However, it seemed that the first prince was special as expected.

Auguste's voice became more stiff due to nervousness.

"I have a request today, with the nobles here as witnesses."

“... Speak.”

Once the emperor spoke, the whole hall fell into silence.

It was so quiet that one could hear his own heartbeat.

At this moment, Regis’ heart was beating furiously.

According to the original plan, this should be the moment where Auguste reports his recovery to the emperor and asks for the commander-in-chief position.

However, Latreille would then use his trump card and reveal Felicia who is impersonating Auguste.

The scenario on the stage right now could be considered the climax.

At this critical moment, Regis changed his script.

Will the goddess of fortune bless this move of ours?... …

Felicia who was acting as Auguste opened her mouth...

“I have yet to recover fully, hence I wish to forfeit my right to the throne.”

Moaning could be heard below the stage.

At least 3 nobles fainted on the spot as countless glasses fell to the ground.

At this moment, the emperor looked at his subjects.

Towards this question, the queen was the first one to consent.

She had been standing at the front of the stage.

It felt as if she was at the centre of the stage, surrounded by nobles. She then looked at Auguste.

“Hohoho, isn’t this fine, Your Majesty? Rather than forcing a sick person do all the work, why not let the brothers work together… What the elder brother can’t do, let the younger brother settle it, isn’t it good?”

Thinking that her son, Latreille, would inherit the throne, her face was full of smiles.

Under such a situation, there was no need for Latreille to reveal that Felicia was acting as Auguste.

As things were outside Latreille's expectation, there was no need to use the real impersonator, Eliane.

The nobles discussed among themselves, not a single voice opposes the queen.

The emperor nodded his head.

"... If that's what you wish, then so be it, my first son."

"Thank you, Father. Actually, I want to recommend a candidate for the throne."

"... A recommendation?"

Once the words were spoken, the hall erupted again.

The nobles were thinking that Latreille would be the next emperor, which was why the queen agreed to let him forfeit his rights.

Auguste was trying to express his thoughts on the stage.

"Indeed, I recommend Marie Quatre Argentina to replace me as the first successor. This sister of mine is courageous and outstanding enough to obtain glory in the battlefield. She also has the support of the public. Moreover, her beautiful crimson hair is the proof that she inherited the blood from the founding emperor. Hence I feel that she's fit for the role."

"... Hmm, Marie Quatre is it…"

"Yes, the nobles supporting me is thinking the same as me and will support her as they believe she has the capability to do so."

Hearing this, it became chaotic among the nobles.

This was Regis' plan.

Since the opponent has a trump card against us, then we will just back down ourselves. After all, you can't eliminate something that's not there.

Latreille's scheme were layered after layered, the neutrals were dancing in his hand. Not just Auguste, he even tried to pull Altina in by making her his consort.

However, just like dispatching troops, when there's more work, the forces you can devote to each of them is weaker.

Strategy is a double-edged sword.

If Altina successfully obtained the inheritance rights, Regis' plan would be more convincing. No one questioned Auguste's recommendation too.

The 2nd concubine and her house would oppose Auguste giving up his inheritance rights. However, they were currently trapped inside their house by Latreille's associates.

This was akin to manipulating a thin thread of cotton rope or walking on a thin rope.

This strategy was already halfway successful.

After hearing Auguste's words, he looked at the side of the stage.

Altina bit her lips nervously, slowly walking on top of the red carpet.

"F,father… … That, I… want to be…!!"

"... Before that, where's your greeting… You're impatient, if you wanna become empress, you have to be as the great white mountain (La Dame Blanche)."

"U,understood! I, want to be the Empress!"

Til the very last, she still forgotten to greet.

Even so, Altina being an empress, commander-in-chief or having great swordsmanship, she was still a 14 year old girl. It was understandable that she was nervous in such a situation.

Till now, no problems surfaced.

After Altina’s declaration, the people present were shaken.

Immediately after that, another person entered the stage. She was Eleanor who was wearing a black dress.

“Greetings, Your Majesty. I’m a representative from the Tiraso Laverde House of the Gaillarde Garden’s Alliance of the southern nobles, Eleanor.”

“... …”

The emperor did not say anything but simply listened.

Eleanor managed to finish her sentence smoothly without pausing. No matter who, they need to be aware of their conduct in front of the emperor.

“We understand His Highness Auguste’s intention, hence we will support Her Highness Argentina as a candidate for the throne. Here, in front of Your Majesty, we await for Your Majesty’s wise decision which will bring prosperity to the Empire.”

Just like how an opera ended, Eleanor elegantly exit the stage.

“... Let me consider this for awhile.”

The emperor let loose a tired voice and leaned against the throne.

He let out a sigh.

“... Originally, there were 5 heirs to inherit my throne… … Now, there’s only two left. Latreille… Argentina… Some things just happen too quickly, … … 50 years just passed in a blink of eyes, it feels as if the past was a dream.”

Auguste then gave a respectful bow.

“I’m grateful that you are willing to listen to my wish, Father.”

The nobles also followed suit

Similarly, Altina also lowered her head.

At the side of hall, Regis also bowed while clenching his fist tightly.

Till the very end, Latreille's associates did not have a chance to appear on the stage. From the start when Auguste recommended Altina til the end.

Not just Latreille's side, even the queen was speechless.

Under such a tense atmosphere, Germain shouted,

“P,please wait, Your Majesty! I'm suspicious of His Highness Auguste there.”

Hmph, Auguste laughed.

“I have been secluded since young… … It has been that way for many years. Now, I'm just a normal man who cast away his title as prince on his own. Do you still have any advice? Moreover, do you need to force me to justify my actions that are not unfilial to Father and cause him a headache?”

“Argh!?”

Auguste who gave up his rights was now no different from any normal nobles. To be suspicious of him right now would mean it was just a personal feud—— This was something that should not be presented in front of the emperor.

Auguste continued his attack.

“Is this how you should behave in the palace? If I may, whose subordinate are you?”

“Arghh… ... “

Germain bit his lips.

Latreille moved by half a step and used his hand to block Germain.

“Withdraw, you can go back now.”

Latreille said coldly.

Germain who went pale bowed and escaped to the exit.

On his way out, his bloodshot eyes kept looking at a spot on top of the stage.

The two brothers of his also chased after him in a hurry, Eliane in her white clothes who had no value also escaped.

“Ah.”

Latreille’s voice managed to bring order back to the hall.

“Please forgive him, he is just faithful to his duty… … Towards brother’s decision, I feel surprised and lonely. However, I will work together with Argentina and carry the future of the nation, please take care of your body, brother.”

“Well, I’ll leave Father and the nation to both of you. Right, although everyone recognises your strength… but you still need to work on picking your staff.”

“... … Thank you for your advice.”

Latreille had a bitter expression, squeezing those words out.

Perhaps the nobles who still believed that Latreille would definitely inherit the throne after watching this was now the minority.

The emperor who hated this tension asked for wine.

At this moment, the 6th concubine Johaprecia who was sitting beside the emperor stood up.

“Fufufu. don’t worry about this, Liam! Isn’t it fine if I give birth to your 6th child?”

“... Yeah.”

Hearing this, many nobles could not hide their disgust..

The eastern nobles also gathered at Altina’s side.

Auguste and Eddie walked out of the hall together. Perhaps they just pulled off an unbelievable show, they seemed to be out of energy.

Altina should also be tense. Ever since coming down from the stage, her face looks tired.

Regis originally thought that Altina would walk towards him——

However, she stopped at some distance away from Regis.

Then, she stare~~~d at him

She just stared at him like this without any words. Actually, the distance was too far apart for conversation.

She then raised her index finger and pressed it near her lips.

After that, she closed one of her eyes and protruded her tongue.

Bleh~~~ She made such a face at Regis.

Altina then exited the hall alone with a face full of anger.

Regis panicked.

“W,wait for me… Al, no… That, princess… “

Regis wanted to chase after her but stopped suddenly.

Latreille was at one side observing him

Latreille was emitting killing intent enough to make people think that it was not strange for him to draw out his Arme Victoire Volonte anytime.

His gaze was sharp like daggers.

If it was Regis from half a year ago, he might be overwhelmed by it and fainted.

Even when Regis was trained mentally at the borders, he was still overwhelmed by it and sat on the couch.

“... … How I wish I could kill you right now.”

In front of the snake that seemed to be looking at him as a prey, Eleanor who was wearing a black dress that emphasised her chest appeared.

“Ara, Regis, did you specifically wait for me here? How cute.”

“It’s not that!!”

After a joke, it felt as if the pressure from Latreille was gone.

——This incident is far from over, it has not ended yet.

Regis stood still for awhile before walking past Eleanor.

“You are going to leave now? You do not need help now?”

“My plan ends here at the moment. Ah, right… Eleanor, I have a favour to ask you.”

“If it’s tonight, it’s fine for you to come to my room.”

“I’m very sorry, but I need to leave the capital immediately… The girl in white clothes just now, if possible, bring her over to our side, her name is Eliane.”

That girl stood among the nobles even when wearing the clothes that was like a bath-clothes.

After a while, Latreille also exited the hall.

It seemed that she became an unimportant presence now.

However, Regis still could not leave yet. Before that, if things that need to be done are not done——

“Does she still have any value?”

“She is still worth investing. It’s possible that she will bring benefits to Auguste and the western nobles.”

“Fufu, I understand.”

“Thanks.”

Regis quickened his pace and walked towards the back of the hall.

Chapter 5 - Uncaged white wolf

Regis did not return to his room.

The brown door of ‘Atlas’ room’ was opened.

Too slow!”

The one who pointed at Regis was Altina who had changed.

She wore the usual clothes that emphasised on the ease of movement, bringing along Grand Tonnerre Quatre.

Because of her actions and dressing, the people of the Empire used to call her ‘the Arrow-sparrow princess’.

However, it seemed that no one ever called her that now.

Other than Altina, Eddie was the only one that used his plain military uniform as a ceremonial clothes.

The difference between Eddie and Altina was that he was carrying Defendre Sept.

Standing beside Altina was Auguste who was still in his ceremonial clothes-- Of course, it was actually Felicia.

Although Regis’ military uniform was in the room, but… …

Regis took a watch out and checked it.

“Looks like there’s no time to change.”

“Still, you should at least wash your face.”

Altina took her handkerchief out and wiped Regis’ face.

“Waah~”

“Keep still!”

Although Altina sounded calm, but she did not hold back. Moreover, her eyes were terrifying.

This was how she wiped Regis’ cheek strongly.

“Ouch, o,ouch…”

“What? So you don’t want to clean this off?”

“No, it’s not painful at all, please continue.”

“That’s right.”

After all this while, the mark left by Eleanor was finally wiped off.

Altina who had an unhappy face all the time stared at Regis.

“Regis, do you like girls that are older than you?”

“... … What are you saying? I never once considered such things before.”

“But, what about the girls in stories? Regis, you like the older type, right?”

“Eh?! You can’t really say that, in count Rudsel’s work ‘Messenger from the Stars’, it was a ground-breaking and fantastic misty heroine”

"Is Misty her name?"

“No, it’s a creature made of mist. Do not mind the small details like the race is different, Groys the protagonist is a tortoise.”

“At the least, the characters should be human.”

“Then, after renting a room in the capital, the protagonist found that a female ghost decided to make the room hers. That ghost, used pankration to break the protagonist’s arm.”

“In my opinion, ghost aren’t human.”

They chatted happily as they drew topics from books.

However, there was no more time for such leisure.

Regis and the rest moved to the deeper area of the room.

Eddie lowered his head and said.

“That, Regis, is it really fine even if we don’t escape?”

Not knowing when, Eddie began to speak to Regis like a friend. Eddie was not only older than Regis, he was also a duke. By right, he should be speaking to Regis in a more lofty manner.

No matter what, it was normal for Regis to feel troubled because of this.

The plan has been proceeding smoothly. Now, Auguste had been liberated from the political struggle. On the other hand, Altina has gained most of the nobles’ support.

“... Normally, it’s fine to exit from the front gate. However, due to the incident earlier, it’s better to be cautious, let’s not exit from the front.”

Auguste—— To be accurate, Felicia casted down her eyes.

“About that, seems like I overdid it.”

“... … That’s also normal. No matter what, it’s impossible to predict the development of event that much, we can only come up with the best answer. For things to go according to our prediction, that’s something that can only be achieved with magic… However, we also cannot just stand aside and let things develop… Til the very end, what we can do is to adapt to the situation, it’s the same right now…”

Noises could be heard from the corridor.

Those were the sounds of people running in their armour.

Hearing this familiar sound, both Altina and Eddie stiffen.

“Wearing heavy armour in the palace?”

“Hey! Could it be that they are here to arrest us?”

“...I’m not sure either… Do you want me to ask them?”

Eddie shook his head at Regis' question.

“Then let’s not do that, instead we should focus on escaping first. We could make an excuse for Latreille like we went back because of an stomach problem.”

Altina made a wry smile after hearing this.

“Eddie, you always said having an stomachache when making excuses.”

“It’s easier to be exposed if I said I had a cold.”

“Ah, I see. Rather, I feel that getting deceived with such excuse will surprise me more.”

“Eh, really?”

Aware of his past mistakes, Eddie began to reflect. At the same time, Regis pushed the curtain aside and opened the windows.

The wind blew in.

The sun was slowly setting in the west.

Although it was still clear, black clouds swept over quickly.

It might rain tonight.

“... … It should be possible to go the courtyard directly from here. I have already made arrangement to join our comrades.”

Felicia slowly moved closer to Regis and brought her face close.

Their shoulders touched.

As she was wearing a male uniform, the gold trinkets made a sound.

Regis slowly moved away while Felicia was slowly closing in.

It resulted in Felicia’s chest touching Regis’ body.

Although Felicia was in man's clothing, she was actually a beauty upon closer look.

They were obviously siblings, Altina was totally different from her.

Altina was healthy and full of vitality. On the other hand, Felicia was like a lake deep in the forest, like a flower blooming in the plateau or like piled up snow, something fleeting that would likely disappear.

Felicia looked out of the window and said hesitantly

“J,jump down… f,from here?”

“Yes, but…”

Years ago, there was a popular book in the palace titled “The lost pearl necklace is in my bag”, the author was Florien Jean du Weiyaller

There was a scene in which the princess jumped down to the courtyard from the ‘Atlas Room’.

Although the room was at the third floor, but the height was the same as normal building which was about 30 Co (13 m) high.

——Master Florien~ That’s impossible?!?!

I suppose that in the novel, the princess had a foothold like a footrest below the window. However, the situation right now is that there is a narrow foothold that not even a mouse can pass through. Rather than saying it as a foothold, it’s better to describe it as an art carved on the wall.

The slight protrusion out of the walls seemed impossible to climb.

There were no portrayals of the princess slowly climbed down using a pillar or digging through the wall with sheer force in the book.

“What’s going on… Am I not thorough with my investigation?... Or is it that the popular book did not conduct any research about this place…”

Altina who heard this also looked down.

“Eh? What, is everything that was written down fake?”

“N,no, there’s no lies. Accurate report isn’t everything, rather, isn’t conjecture the first step to entertainment?”

“Why are you crying? Although I’m not very clear, but we just need to jump down, right?”

“... … That was my plan.”

“The faster we go down, the better?”

“Well, yes.”

Regis nodded.

Eddie then opened all the windows.

The strong wind blew in.

“I’m going ahead.”

Beside Regis, Eddie held the waist of Felicia who was looking down.

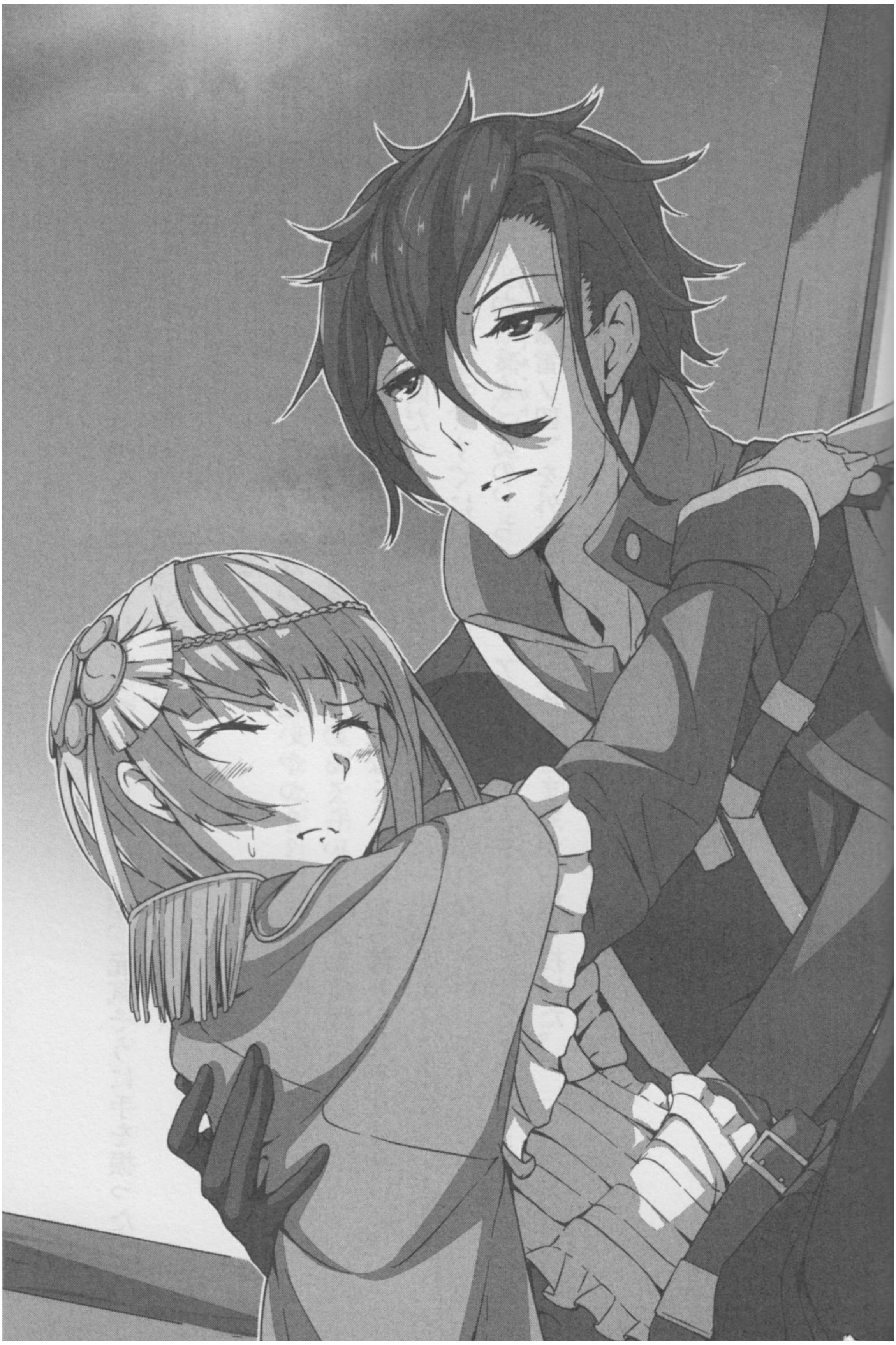
“Hyaa!?”

“Felicia… Hold tight, don’t speak and close your eyes.”

“O,okay, thanks.”

“There’s no need to thanks me.”

Eddie lightly used his hand to support Felicia’s legs and waist, carrying her in a princess-style.



Eddie jumped down from the third floor with a girl as if he was using the stairs to go down.

“Yot~to”

——Almost effortlessly.

Regis stared at them who landed safely after jumping out of the window.

Even if Eddie was fine with it, this should be shocking to Felicia.

However, Eddie kicked the wall about 15Co (7m) above the ground.

What sorcery is this? They were falling at a very slow speed.

Thus, they successfully landed.

Felicia who just descended was full of spirit and waved.

Regis began doubting his own eyes.

“... What just happened?”

“He applied a little strength on the foothold slightly below the window, did you not see it?”

“... By foothold, you mean that slightly protruding carving??”

“Yes, if it has more than one finger length of space, you can reduce the landing speed.”

“To do that during the fast journey down? It’s impossible for me… Seems like I won’t be descending from here. Altina, although it was short, I won’t ever forget the time I spent with you… Ahh, If I‘m killed instantly, then I can’t say that I won’t forget, it’s just a few days after all… Eh, that, wait, Altina~? What are you doing?...”

Altina removed the Grand Tonnerre Quatre from her back, kept it in the scabbard and tossed it out of the window.

A loud sound could be heard from the ground.

“Okay, now it’s your turn, Regis.”

“W,what are you planning to do? I can’t, absolutely unable to go down, no~”

Altina carried Regis from his waist, using both of her hand to support his back and knee.

“Don’t speak and close your eyes… Ah, that… that, hugging me tightly is fine.”

“No!~”

Altina also princess-carried Regis and jumped down the window.

Huu~~, The sound of the wind reached his ears.

It felt as if he was floating.

Soon, they reached the ground.

Regis experienced two impacts.

The last impact felt as if all the air in Regis’ lung was forced out, causing him to roll around the ground.

“... … …”

“Regis, did something happen? Is it painful?”

“... I thought that I was going to die.”

“You're alive, right?”

“... … To think that you guys dare to do such outrageous things.”

Altina who recovered from the fall went and picked her sword.

“I’m different from Eddie, not using the foothold is fine for me… Are we not talking discussing about something urgent?”

“... Ahh, I knew this will happen.”

This was all because I thought of Altina as a normal person.

Eddie stretched his hand out to help Regis up.

Regis’ knee was shaking not due to the impact, but due to the terror of his near-death experience.

“... Haah… …Let's hurry up to the courtyard.”

“This way! Let me lead the way, I’m very familiar with the area here.”

The temporary fence that used as a blockade was smashed by Altina’s sword.

After reaching the courtyard, three horses were prepared there.

Regis and the rest united with Eric there.

“It’s great that you are fine.”

Regis nodded towards Eric who expressed a peace of mind.

“I bet that they did not think we would jump down from the third floor, which is why we are not discovered. We will be too eye-catching if we walked through the streets.”

“The journey begins here.”

Altina smiled after seeing one of the horses in the line.

“Ara, Isn’t this child the one that Latreille gave me? I thought I won’t be seeing it again.”

It was a maroon-coloured military horse, golden tail and the hind legs were white at the front.

“I thought so too, but I managed to bring it along with the help of the people working in the stables.”

“Is that so, that’s great!”

As Altina’s subordinate requested for three horses, someone comprehend the dire situation they were in.

In another perspective, Regis worried that the enemy deliberately did not control the movement of horses.

Before leaving the capital, everything seemed smooth.

“... Let’s hurry and set off.”

“That, Regis.”

Eric spoke hesitantly.

“Yes?”

“Actually, I did not manage to loan a light carriage. Instead, there’s only the slow luxurious carriage.”

“... I see, that’s inevitable anyway. I’m not good in riding horse either.”

Seems like we are going to part here.

I hope I don’t need to escape on foot.

Perhaps I should hide at my friends’ house while Altina and the rest escape.

At this point, Felicia also lowered her head and said.

“Actually… I do not know how to ride a horse.”

“What, it’s just that? Ride with me then.”

Eddie supported Felicia waist and helped her onto the horse.

“Hyaa!~”

“The horse will kick randomly if you keep moving around.”

“Eh~~~~~”

Felicia swallowed down her cries.

This was how Felicia got on top of the horse while Eddie sat behind her.

Even though it was carrying two people, the horse did not move about as it was trained.

“Th~ere there, what a good child. Be it the horse or Felicia, you need to behave.”

Regis suddenly felt something bad was going to happen.

He felt someone grabbing his belt.

“W,wait, Altina… C,calm down. Even if both of us are light, there’s still the sword.”

“Don’t say such foolish words, Regis. If I have to leave one behind, I will absolutely choose the sword.

“... … Anything but that.”

“Then stop being so long-winded, learn from Felicia and just sit still quietly.”

“... … I,I understand.”

Regis gradually gave in.

With the help of Altina, Regis climbed onto the maroon horse.

He did not fall off and sat steadily.

If it was the past Regis, he would have shouted while climbing onto the horse back. Any horse would hated that and attempt to shake him off.

“... Eh, I did not fall off?”

“Could it be that you always ride a horse with a dreadful mood?”

“Because falling down will be painful.”

“It feels good while riding, hence it’s normal to be painful after falling down.”

“... Because I never rode it before, I’m not clear of that.”

“In that case, you should try to enjoy it now.”

The arrangement were Regis and Altina, Felicia and Eddie, and Eric alone.

Altina pulled the reins to change the direction the horse was going. Ah, no, it’s accurate to say that the horse changed to the correct direction himself.

“What a smart horse.”

“It seems that way.”

"Have you not named him?"

"... … I will name him once we returned safely."

Regis and the rest walked along the palace's wall.

Even if it was just the courtyard, it was still big. Altina increased the speed of the horse, Eddie and Eric also did the same and maintained the same speed as Altina.

Be it the palace's wall, railings, lawns, flowerbeds or even the patrolling soldiers, the surrounding scenery flew past them.

Felicia's expression was as if she was about to cry.

Regis who had a similar expression looked at Felicia.

Although the situation now did not allow them to be slow, but the speed was too terrifying.

At this moment, Eddie moved the horse closer to Altina.

"Ahh, that reminds me, Regis~"

"...W,wha,what!?"

Not only was it shaky on top of the horse, the clatter of hoofs was loud, hence Eddie shouted.

"Clarisse and Lilim, they were escorted out by Abidal Evra."

"Ahh, okay."

As Regis was not used to horse riding, he could not speak properly.

It's great that the both of them escaped.

Regis told Abidal Evra and the rest to leave the capital first, in his plan, 8 riders was not going to make a difference.

Avoiding any pointless sacrifice.

If Altina and Felicia escaped now, it will be our victory.

There's no need for us to exit via the front gate.

Regis was prepared to exit from the gate which was used by the supply carriages.

“There’s knights ahead!”

Eric shouted.

In the path towards the gate, there were about 10 knights holding spears.

Green armour covered their body.

Regis did not have the time to think about other things.

Regis turned his head to Altina and said.

“... … They are imperial guards! Although I do not know how they get the information about us, but it will be troublesome if we are stopped here.”

“Are they strong?”

“Although they are soldiers, they did not participate in any war, they are typical children sent out to train in the army and hail from good families.”

“I see.”

“Try not to be too harsh on them… …”

“So we can easily charge them!”

“Wait, Altina!?”

“Keep your head down!”

When Altina shouted, Regis already stuck his body to the horse as close as possible. Altina was leaning on Regis’ back.

“... … argh.”

“Maintain it like this, charge~~~~~~!”

She commanded with the aura of commanding an army of thousands.

But in reality, it were only Eddie and Eric.

The imperial guards raised their spears in a panic. In addition, they were supposed to prevent people from entering, hence their direction was facing the gate...

“S,stop right there!”

They seemed to receive a command to stop all personnel from passing through.

Altina turned a deaf ear to it.

They did not slow down at all.

“I am the 4th princess of Belgaria, Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria. Listen to my command, withdraw now and you will be pardoned!”

A group of the knights retreated.

However, there was still 5 knights pointing the spears at their direction.

Altina released the reins and used her legs to stabilise herself while using Grand Tonnerre Quatre.

“Heyaaaa——————!”

The sword and spears clashed.

The line of spears was shattered just like that.

Altina’s idea of smashing their spear and breaking through is reckless. This horse also have a problem for it to act in concert with her, was what Regis thought

This horse was only ridden by Altina twice and was able to understand its owner’s personality.

“How are you able to understand Altina’s thought?”

“Ara, I talked to him every morning.”

“So that’s the reason!!!!”

Perhaps that was the reason why the people working in the stable were so willing to help.

However, if it was me, forget three days, not even three years will I be able to make the horse rush into the spears, was what Regis thought.

Eddie who followed them shouted.

“What a convenient sword!”

“Do you want to try switching it?”

“Haa~! I feel that I won’t be able to lift it, so forget it.”

“Ahahaha.”

This isn’t something worth laughing, just carrying this is already tough for normal people.

If not for the military horse, the horse should not be able to move with the weight of two people and the sword combined.

Precisely because of that, the sword’s destructive power was like a lightning strike.

Just by waving the sword was enough to shatter the spears, it was even strong enough to cause the heavy cavalry to step back.

Although the imperial guards were often ridiculed being weak and for ceremonial uses, Altina’s aura and the sword’s strength were not normal either.

After the gate was breached,

Regis pointed in a direction.

“Just continue to head towards the north!”

“Okay!”

“... Most likely there will be pursuers, those real knights.”

If possible, please give me a pleasant surprise, was what Regis prayed for. However, that would never come true as those thoughts were not feasible.

Coming out of the capital, they reached outside——

They were close to the hills.

From the back came the clattering sounds, a dust cloud was drawing near them.

Regis turned his head to confirm the pursuers.

When their white armours received the light of the setting sun, they got a golden and deep red color.

“... Although there is no banners, but, they… should be the Knights of the White Wolves!”

They were the core of the first army.

“They were the one that welcomed us, to think that they are the one sending us off.”

“Do you want to greet them?”

“Yeah, they will catch up with us soon anyway.”

Normally, the speed of the heavy cavalry was not fast enough to chase after Regis and the rest. However, as 2 horses were carrying the weight of two people on their side, the heavy cavalry gradually caught up.

Regis was looking at the map inside his brain.

He then pointed at an direction and told Altina to move towards that direction.

“Let’s go towards that small hill first.”

“Is there anything there?”

“If we want to survive, that is the only way out.”

“Regis, the horse is about to hit its limit.

“No matter what, we must reach the small hill.”

“If we pushed too hard, we won’t be able to escape later on!?”

Regis and the rest head towards the normal looking hill. In the pursuers’ perspective, it seemed like they were running around randomly to as if they were avoiding rain.

There is a small hill near the capital, on top was a vast plains which cannot be used to obstruct vision.

The horse’s hoof was covered in mud as this area was a wetland.

The speed of the horse would be reduced over here.

They have never used bows and guns against them as they were likely ordered to bring them back unharmed.

Latreille’s aide wanted to make up for his losses, to capture Auguste back and reveal his real identity.

Following that, they would have the rights to nullify her recommendation of Altina being a candidate, hence eliminating the obstacles for Latreille to inherit the throne.

Clinging to the horse, a man muttered.

“... Prince Latreille, you are a military man. Til the end, you can only rely on the soldiers. Because of your over-reliance, you never would have guessed this would happen, hence you did not make any preparation, is it not such? No, could it be that the one leading the soldiers this time is Germain?”

The smell of oil gradually intensified.

Dragging through the mud, the horses finally went past the wetlands and reached the summit.

The sky was gradually getting darker.

“... I would definitely book a carriage if there were still time.”

“Isn’t it your fault for not considering that into your plan?”

“That is so, however the plan is about to succeed.”

The horse which carried Felicia and Eddie, as well as Eric’s horse also reached the summit. The horses' breathing was very erratic.

The Knights of the White Wolves also reached the wetland and heading towards the summit. If projectile weapons were allowed, the distance now was close enough to shoot and that others could overhear a conversation should there be one.

At the front was the captain of the knights.

The white armour shined under the radiance of the dusk.

“My name is Constant Felix de Bartoli!! Prince Auguste, please return to the capital with me.”

“Absolutely not!”

The one who rejected them was Eddie.

In fact, they did not even want to hear what the opposite side had to say.

Constant, the captain of the Knight of the White Wolves drew his sword, which looked yellowish under the light of the setting sun.

“In that case, I can only do the best of my capability to bring you back.”

The knights behind him did the same and drew their swords.

The enemies was about 1000.

They had crossed three hills ever since setting off from the capital, yet not a single one dropped out. As expected of the strongest unit in the Imperial Army.

Altina held up her sword.

“Despite knowing who I am, you still dare to say these kind of words? Do you still consider yourself as a Belgaria’s knight? Or is it that you are just Latreille’s private army?”

“For the Empire! We need to bring Prince Auguste back to the capital, that I firmly believe!”

“Then you should carry out your faith! I will not yield no matter who is my opponent!”

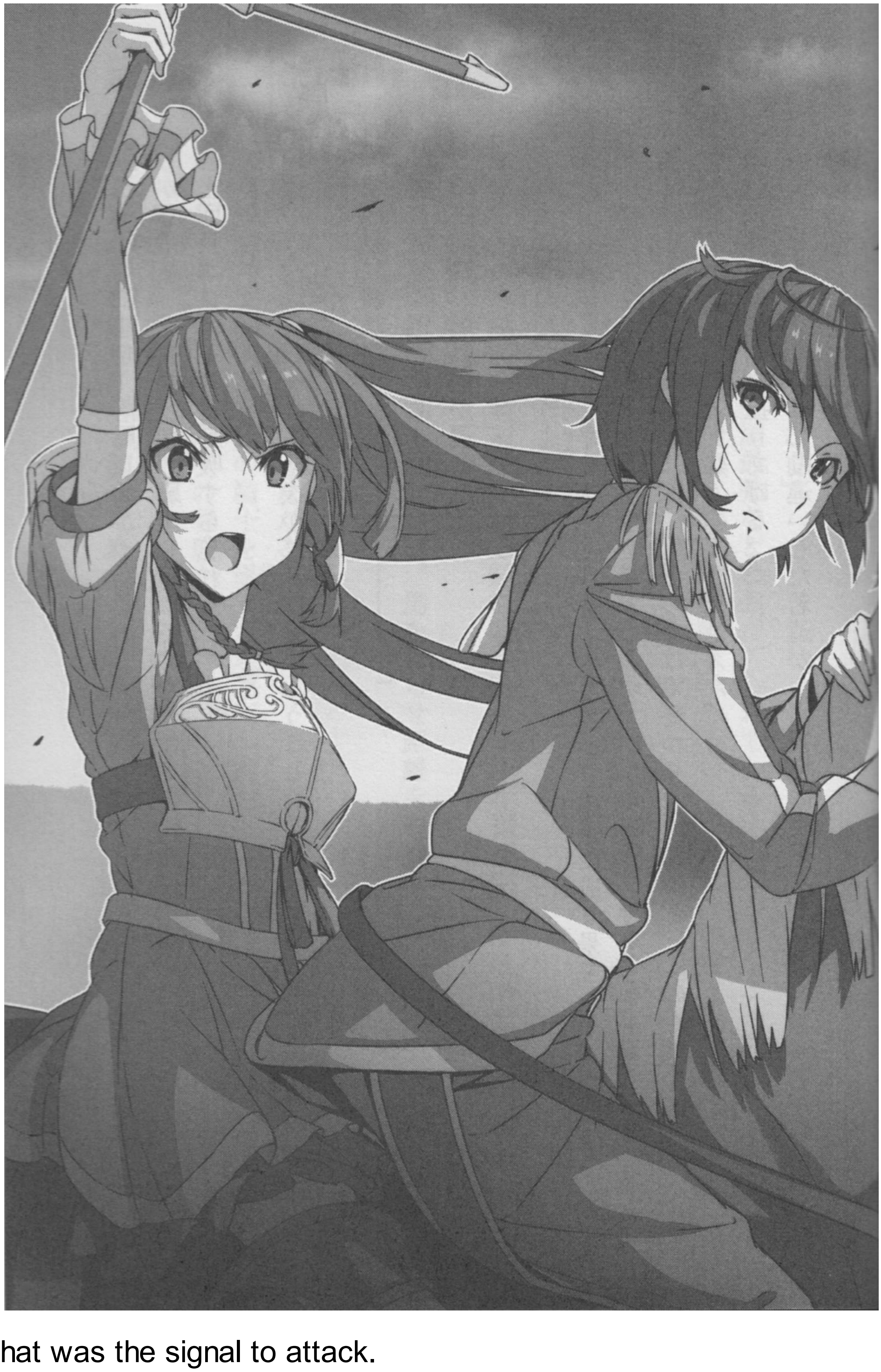
“Yes~!”

It had reached to the point where words were no longer required, Constant ordered the attack.

The knights who were still on the muddy area charged.

It was close enough to see the pupil of the closest knights, it was too late to turn back and escape now.

Altina brandished the large sword of hers.



That was the signal to attack.

Roaring sounds could be heard on the hill behind them.

Knights who were wearing black armour appeared.

This ambush reduced the aggression of the enemy.

Constant could not believe it and moaned.

“... … That’s actually Jerome’s Black Knights!? Could they be the decoy?... Still, with just a mere 500 knights from the countryside? The elite troops of mine will not lose!! Attack~~! Do not let prince Auguste escape!!”

The enemy once again going on the offensive.

At this point, the Black Knights fired fire arrows, their target was the center of the Knights of the White Wolves.

Using fire arrows on cavalry was not effective at all.

However, the Knights of the White Wolves realised the stench around them.

“It’s oil!”

It was too late to shout that out now.

On this vast wetland was filled with the cheap plants for oil extraction in the empire.

The result would be the same no matter what action was to be taken.

Oil is a combustible liquid and the area here was filled with barrels of such oil.

Pillar of fire rose into the sky

Cries and screams could be heard

Under the setting sun, the wetland contained a flaming lotus flower.

The figures of the cavalry were hard to see in the red flames.

Some allowed their horse to run freely, others fell off their mount and escaped from the hellfire.

However, what awaits the knights who lost their momentum was the spears of the Black Knights.

The White Wolves captain Constant couldn't breathe.

His own unit was falling in the flames.

These elites among elites, these warriors that were trained for many years had become charcoal just like this.

“Ahhhhh————!!!!”

Constant let out an angry and desperate cry.

Before him was someone dressed in black.

“Hmph, how foolish… If you could issue orders other than ‘attack’, your units wouldn't be burning like fuel.”

“How despicable, Black Knight Jerome! You have lost sight of the chivalry path and turned into a demon!!”

“Huhu, this demon-like method is what our strategist excels in. Moreover, had you notice the oil and halted your advances, you should understand that you shouldn't be moving forward, useless captain.”

Jerome who was on a horse raised his 'Le Cheveux D'une Dame'.

Constant also drew his longsword.

“It must be an error that a youngster like you is flattered as a hero! Your so-called achievements must be due to the soldiers of Germania Federation being too weak.”

“Kukuku… … Although you guys were hailed as the strongest unit in the empire… But what results have you gotten for the past three years? In the end, you guys are just clowns who are waving the title of being the strongest in the empire.”

“How dare you ridicule the First Army?!”

“Kuhahaha! That prideful army, because of your lack of intelligence, have already burned to a crisp.”

“You bastard!!!”

With bloodshot eyes, Constant charged towards Jerome with his sword.

This was a sharp thrust.

Jerome used his spear and blocked it, allowing the horse retreat to a distance enough for a charge.

The spear was longer compared to a sword.

“Ha!”

In a moment, Jerome thrust out 3 to 4 times.

This was the technique he used to kill the enemy cavalry during the Volk Fortress’ Siege.

Constant let go of the reins, each hand holding a sword, blocking the attacks.

“Ho~ I thought that you would have lost your strength from holding wineglasses in the palace all day.”

“I don't drink!

“Pardon for my mistake. Could it be that's the reason why your brain is empty?”

“Die, you foolish person!”

Constant used the left hand to block the spear while the right hand thrust at Jerome’s heart.

“You are looking down on me if you think that using a single hand can ward off my attack.”

“Ah!~”

The spears that was deflected suddenly came again in the same speed as before.

However, the strength applied was different.

The first attack was to cause a crack on Constant's sword, the second was to break it.

By the third attack, there would no longer be a sword in his left hand to block.

The white steel armour was punctured.

“Gyaha~”

“That reminds me, among the 3 knight orders in the first army, what is your ranking? Don't tell me you are the strongest, if that is so, I'm too disappointed… Eh?”

The White Wolves captain died just like this and could not answer his question.

Jerome removed the spear and Constant fell down from the horse.

“Tch, what an ugly sight… If you tighten your grip with your thighs at the last moment, you would not have fallen off the horse even when you die. To believe that the enemy nation's soldiers are weak, you are just another fool that love horses.”

If Regis was not on the horse, Altina would have entered the battle.

Altina had been watching the fight between Jerome and Constant.

“That guy sure is strong.”

“Sir Jerome is strong indeed… … Well, my eyes couldn't keep up with their movement.”

“Did he hold back during our duel?”

“The choice of weapon is also a factor in a duel… Jerome will be stronger than you if he is using a spear and mounted.”

“Compared to Latreille, which side do you think is stronger?”

“... That is also something I want to know.”

Eddie replied in her stead.

“Jerome should be stronger when using the spear? Latreille will win if it is limited to sword. The spear is strong in the battlefield after all. If it's in a confined space and a close combat starts, under those special circumstances that would be different.”

“I see.”

“Argentina’s sword is special, hence it is not a good reference.”

Eddie shrugged his shoulders and changed the subject.

“——That reminds me, using fire was part of your strategy?”

“Yes, because I feel that the chances of the First Army chasing us is quite high.”

“You even know this?”

“Based on the situation at the banquet, Latreille will be considering about something. If we change the way we think, after the clash, the chances of him losing credibility is high. Be it emotionally or logically, considering in the point of the commander-in-chief, Latreille will resort to using the First Army… Isn’t thatto be expected?”

“Ah, is that so?”

Eddie tilted his head and said.

Ever since the beginning, Felicia was unaware of how the military works.

Altina shrugged her shoulder.

“Hearing it from you, it will be easy to understand. However, if I were to think alone, I won’t think that far ahead. Before setting off, who knows what will happen. The only thing I can do would to be more careful.”

“... Is that so?”

“Was it really necessary to attack with fire?”

“Regarding this, think about it, the knight orders is the core of the First Army, hence they are quite prideful. Therefore, the chances of them wanting a fair fight is high, hence using fire on them just come naturally to me.”

“Looks like what Jerome said was true, how despicable.”

“I believe that using 1000 knights to chase after 5 people on 3 horses isn’t noble either.”

“That… indeed.”

“... Now, Altina, please sit behind a little.”

“I won’t be able to see the enemy that way.”

“The situation has already concluded, we should be retreating too. There should be messenger soldiers behind, so the army will also withdraw.

“Just withdraw like this?”

“Ahh, there is no longer a need to fight, we are just pushing it if we continue to do so… … they should be returning to the capital.”

Interlude

On the last day of the anniversary, the capital had a more lively atmosphere than usual.

Under the oil lamp bright light, a group of tattered knights were moving on the street.

The people who were in a festival mood were stunned seeing this as they had stopped singing, some even had their wine bottle slipped off their hand.

The sight of the knights who were advancing while dragging their feet.

They had a lifeless look as if they lost a war.

Is that really the symbol of the empire's strength, the First Army?

There were well-informed people that had confirmed the news.

"I heard that their opponent was the hero Jerome from Marie Quatre army!"

The tavern was a place where intelligence was exchanged due to the large flow of people. People gathered after hearing this news.

"Is it a civil war or a rebellion?"

"No~pe, prince Auguste gave up his inheritance rights and recommended the 4th princess instead! Hence, Prince Latreille sent the First Army but was defeated!"

"Even if they are the Black Knight Order, that's too unbelievable!"

"That's because in Marie Quate Army, there is the strategist Regis. People who witnessed the fight said that he seemed to use magic to set the wetland ablaze, trapping the knights in the fire."

"Magic, is it?... … That might be true as he commanded only 2000 people to conquer Volk Fortress."

“I, heard that it’s just 200.”

“There’s no way that it can be 200, you fool!”

“Although prince Latreille said that he will definitely inherit the throne, but… If a war happens, it will be nice if the Marie Quatre army win.”

“What are you saying? If prince Latreille didn’t win, this nation won’t be called Belgaria.”

“Now is the time for the people to grasp the power from the nation.”

“Shut up, you fool!”

“Absolutely not… ...”

“W,wait… …”

The venue was starting to be chaotic, it seemed like it would take some time before things settled down.

Imperial Palace Le Brane——

There was not a single noble who dared to break the rules at the venue used for the banquet.

Prince Auguste giving up his rights and elected princess Argentina as the first candidate in line.

Following that, the First Army was mobilised and it was clear that the knights were defeated.

The prospects that the nobles had predicted was overturned in a single night. Now, they gathered their companions and were discussing their future actions.

The wine bottle that was not even half empty was lifted. Crimson liquid was poured into a glass from the bottle.

“...”

Latreille was sitting there.

There was someone trembling beside him.

The orangish-yellow hair had turned white.

He was Germain.

“M,my lord… …”

“What is it, my strategist?”

“A,at the very least, please end me personally.”

Germain kneeled down.

His shoulders was trembling non-stop.

Latreille shook the glass and tasted the wine.

“Punishment? Have you committed any crime~?”

“... I,I, because I wanted to make up for my loss, I mobilised the First Army.”

“Ahh, it seems there is that. Not only that, the First Army was defeated. The whole capital are discussing about this. Huhu, that strategist really is a demon.”

“I have betrayed… B,betrayed Your Highness’ trust in me.”

“Hmm, I’m not suited to be the emperor, isn’t that what those nobles are saying?”

“Ku… …”

Germain whose hair had turned white was sobbing.

Latreille finished drinking the wine in the glass.

“Huhuhu, why are you saying all this, Germain? No matter what happened, it’s all my sin, so why is it that you need to be punished?”

“... W,why?”

Germain lifted his head.

Latreille once again filled the glass in his hand with wine.

The overflowing wine spilled onto the floor.

The red liquid slowly stained a large area of the floor.

The confused Germain looked at the red stained floor.

“Uuh... ”

“Similar to this, water that was spilled cannot be drunk. However, if there is a glass, we can pour the wine into it again.”

The empty glass was filled to the brim once more.

“How is it, Germain? The colour of the wine after spilling and before spilling is different, and the taste is also different, right?”

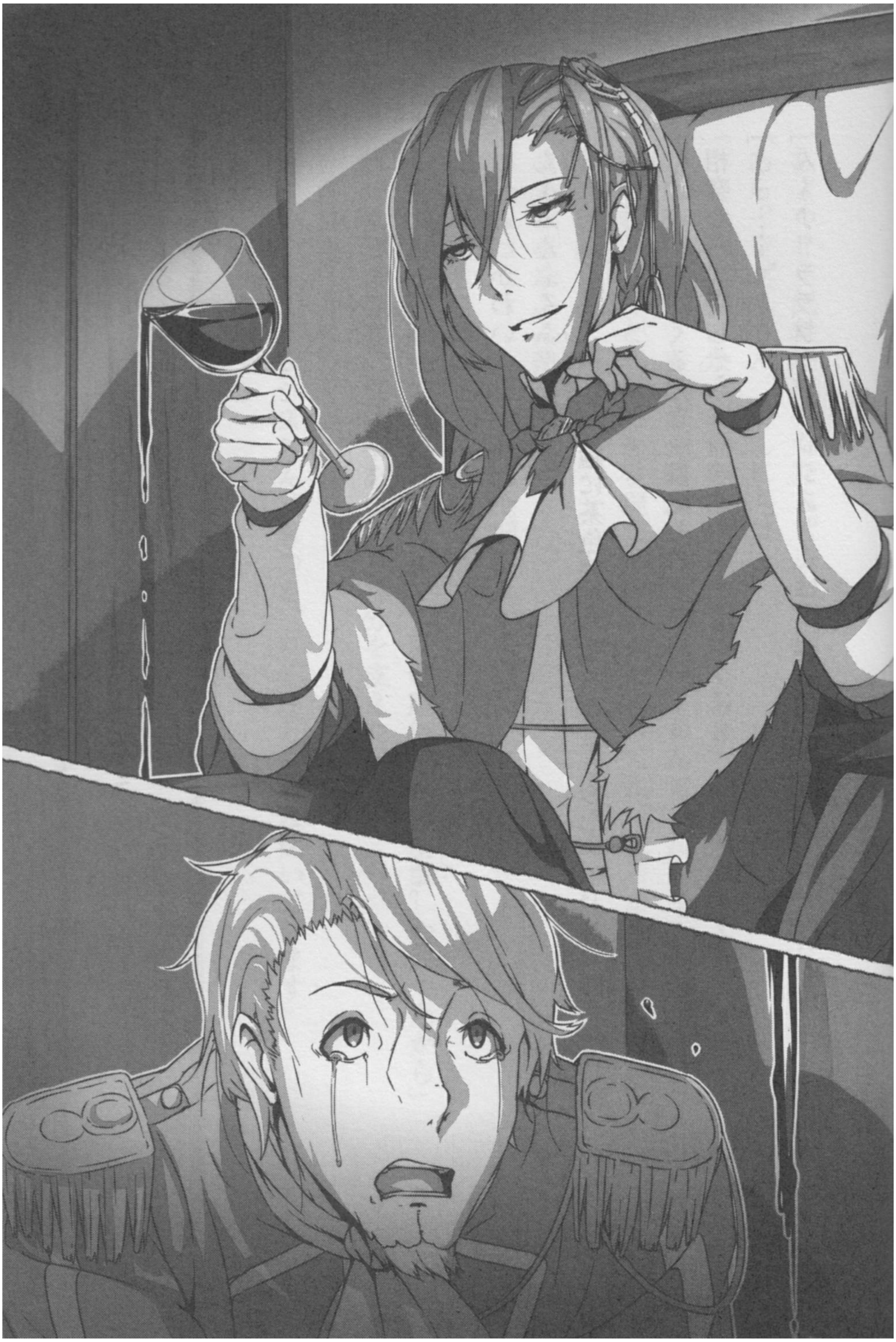
“... I,it’s different.”

“Isn’t it? Just that is it necessary to throw away the wine glass because some a glass of wine was spilled? What we should do now, is to pour new wine into the glass. Do you understand that, Germain? Please do not forget that both you and I are on the same boat.”

“O,oooooooh~~~~”

Germain was moved to tears.

Latreille just shook the glass, looking out of the window to the shimmering street light.



Chapter 6 - The Queen's Navy

One week later——

Volk Fortress

After lunch, Regis was going to the commander’s room while holding intelligence report.

The door to the room was half-opened.

Humming could be heard coming from the inside.

“Hmm~ hmm~”

Regis looked into the room from the gap, a brown eyed, brown haired maid was currently wiping the desk.

She was singing while doing a turn happily.

She is still cleaning with such a cheery mood. Ah, it feels like it will be troublesome if I enter now.

“...”

“Hmm~ La la la~ Regis~ love to peep~”

“W,wait?! Couldn’t you say a word if you know that I’m here?”

“Ara, you’re here, good afternoon, Regis.”

“... … Why are you pretending that you just noticed me… …”

“If it’s about the meeting, it hasn’t started yet, so why are you so early?”

“Although it has yet to begin, I need some time to sort the report. If the report is too long, Jerome will be unhappy about it, while Altina… She might even fall asleep.”

“Well, hehe, it seems that everyone is enthusiastic about this.”

“Really, that’s really so.”

“Ara, Regis, should those words be told to them?”

“... … … Wait, it feels like something important in my heart was broken.”

Clarisse whose hand was using the table as a support, began laughing.

“There’s not going to be a problem, Regis. Altina and the rest will listen to your suggestion.”

“I,is that so?”

“Yes, the princess didn’t escape after hearing the menu after all.”

“... … That’s because clothings, food and shelter are important. Living is a tough thing after all.”

“Could it be that you pay attention to what you eat?”

“Of course…”

That reminds Regis about his breakfast this morning.

Lately, Regis' appetite was rather good as there were not much books to read or administrative work. Neither was there any business for Regis to go out for.

“... … Ah, I’m sorry for not expressing gratitude to you before eating.”

“Fufu, why would I blame you over this kind of things… That reminds me, I heard something interesting from the princess.”

“Eh? What is it?”

“That Regis prefer older woman.”

“Ahhh, that…”

Regis was used to this, Clarisse will definitely use that to tease me, was what he thought.

Clarisse was unsatisfied after seeing Regis' reaction.

"How calm."

"Age doesn't matter to me, that's right, I also feel bad for panicking easily… That should be Eleanor's problem, moreover, she already has three husbands."

"Even though the two of you kissed?"

"Didn't I say it? It was her way of cracking a joke."

I see, I see. Clarisse shown a look as if she understood it.

She should understand this by now.

Seems like the conversation ended, I'm relieved.

"In other words, it's fine to kiss you if it's not a joke?"

"Eh?"

Not knowing when, Clarisse's hand was already on Regis' cheek.

"I am also joking, it should be fine to report this to the princess."

"Wait, ah, no… … I don't think this is a good idea even for a joke."

"Ara, so it's fine if it's serious?"

"Eeh? W,what do you mean?"

Regis fixed his gaze at Clarisse.

The distance between their face was very close, Regis could see his own reflection from Clarisse's eyes.

Clarisse is really a beauty, Regis thought.

Regis could felt Clarisse's breathing.

A passionate voice came out from Clarisse's mouth.

"Huhu~, it's fine, right? Regis, are you prepared?"

"... That… … I never once thought that you will want to kiss someone like me.”

“That, can I take it as a yes?”

Regis fell into deep thoughts.

He was searching for an answer in his bookshelf before finding a suitable answer.

“... If you are just joking, it’s better not to do these kind of jokes, you should cherish yourself even more.”

“What if it’s not a joke?”

“If you are serious, then all the more I wish that your cherish yourself. You are still young and beautiful, hence you should choose a better partner.”

Clarisse frowned.

Is she angry because I lectured her?

“... … Well, a person like me that has uncertain future, no matter how one see…I have neither strength nor wealth and I couldn’t even ride a horse.”

“Really, Regis doesn’t understand anything.”

“Eh?”

Clarisse then moved her finger from Regis’ cheek to his lip, causing him to be embarrassed.

Regis unknowingly straighten his posture.

“Let me tell you one thing… … You never once view woman as a thing or an animal, but also never depend on them. You don’t yell out when you’re in a bad mood, neither do you get violent when drunk.”

“Ahh, I think that my sister did all that.”

“What an incredible teacher, in the other way of speaking.”

“Hahaha… Well, even if that is the case, I was raised well. I’m very grateful to her.”

The reason why I’m not used to females who are older than me is also because of her.

As Regis continued to talk, Clarisse touched Regis’ ear.

It's itchy.

“Belgaria is a nation that emphasise on military, rational men like you are very rare.”

“Well, like I said… I’m already aware that I’m too weak for a man. It’s fine.”

Clarisse was discouraged as if she was defeated by Regis.

Huh? Regis tilted his head in confusion.

As the sound of the footsteps drew nearer, Altina finally appeared.

“Ara, so early? And I thought that I was the first. Right, have you heard of it? That the underground water system actually contain fishes!! It’s rather big too! Next time I catch them, I will have the chef roast them.”

Seeing Altina appeared, Clarisse went and hugged her.

“Uuhh… … Only the princess can heal me.”

“Uh, eh? Like I said, the fish...”

“Yes, yes.”

As the three were chatting, Jerome, Abidal Evra and Eric came one after another.

Felicia who was acting as Auguste and Eddie appeared too.

“That, is it fine for me to be here?”

“That should be my line, is there anything I can do here?”

“... It’s fine even if you do nothing. We will be troubled if the real identity of prince Auguste is exposed. You already helped us by staying here temporary. In addition, there is also some things that requires your help.”

“Don’t worry about it and just ask us, we also wish to repay the favour.”

“Eh? There isn’t a need… Rather, it should be me instead. To successfully counter Latreille’s scheme, it was all thanks to Your Highness Auguste and Sir Eddie's assistance.”

“That reminds me, I heard that you like to play chess, why don’t you have a match with me?”

“Really? That’s great!”

As both of them were the type that like to stay at home, both Regis and Felicia were able to get along easily.

Altina who saw this development lightly elbowed Regis.

“Regis, that, do you like to fish?”

“Eh? Fishing??! That…”

“Haa~!!!! So, you're one of those that prefers them younger!?”

“... Please calm down Altina, think before you say anything, please have a seat there.”

“Hmph.”

Don, Jerome put the shortsword on the table and said,

“Hurry and begin the meeting.”

“Y,yes.”

Everyone hurried and sat on their designated seats.

It was getting foggy.

Chaineboule which the Trouin House controlled was a medium sized city with a rather large harbour.

A naval base was also located there. Inside the base, there were 3 warship and 10 cannons. The relationship was good with the neighbouring country, High Britannia, which was separated by a sea.

For the past few years, war did not occur there.

However, since half a month ago, the empire’s second army has been stationed there, causing the neighbouring country to be unhappy about.

In the morning 7 o’clock——

It was about time for fisherman to return to the port.

It was not very visible near the sea due to the fog. There should not be any trouble as the sea was calm at the moment and the port should have lighted up a fire. This was such a situation.

Rodolphe who was on duty stood on the wooden stage as usual, looking for the town. Rodolphe was a young merchant who worked at the port. He was twenty this year, not a soldier, but a merchant.

“I can’t see anything at all…”

Visibility was bad due to the fog.

On day like this, it was easy for two boat to collide.

Rodolphe’s sense of hearing was more sensitive than his sense of sight.

He heard an unfamiliar sound.

It sounded like a giant creature breathing.

The sea was stirred, something unknown was moving close to the harbour.

“... This is?”

In the fog, a giant shadow slowly appeared.

“A ship?”

However, there was no sail.

A ship in distress?

It does not seems like it.

The ship in front of Rodolphe slowly revealed its identity.

There was a large pillar on the large ship. Black smoke was coming out of the pillar.

——Steam-powered ship

Rodolphe took some time to recall the name of this ship from a rumour he heard.

Although Belgaria tried to construct one, nobody at the port saw this thing before. Moreover, the nation's technology was not advanced enough.

A roaring sound like a thunderbolt resounded.

The warships stationed in the naval base was basked in light.

It exploded.

The shock wave from the explosion even affected the observation post which was quite a distance away.

“Ughh!?”

Compared to the merchant Rodolphe who was stunned seeing this, the soldiers had already reacted.

Everyone were escaping out of the camp.

The 10 cannons that were arranged in a line at the port also began to fire.

However, it was just the sound of the cannon firing.

The cannonball could not hit the enemy ship.

The mysterious ship once again fired, the other warships in the port also got destroyed. The Belgaria ships were getting destroyed one-sidedly.

What an overwhelming firepower.

Moreover, the giant ship moved freely even without wind.

Not only is it fast.

It’s also agile.

Rodolphe stood there in a daze from the start to the end.

The warship was in flames, all was destroyed. Even the cannon was in bad condition.

The witless soldiers continued to use their gun to shoot at the enemy’s cannon.

The scene made people think they were witnessing God’s Wrath.

Belgaria’s military was being ravaged by such advanced technology.

Under the constant barrage, the mysterious ship slowly got closer.

The veil of fog was also slowly dissipating.

Rodolphe stared at the battlefield, it seems what he thought was correct.

The flag on the steam-powered boat belongs to High Britannia, the flag of a country that ruled by the queen.

Belgaria’s western port was decimated in about half an hour

As expected of the Queen’s navy.

Suddenly, the ship fired a cannonball in Rodolphe's direction.

Credits

Author — (むらさき ゆきや) Yukiya Murasaki

Illustrator — himesuz

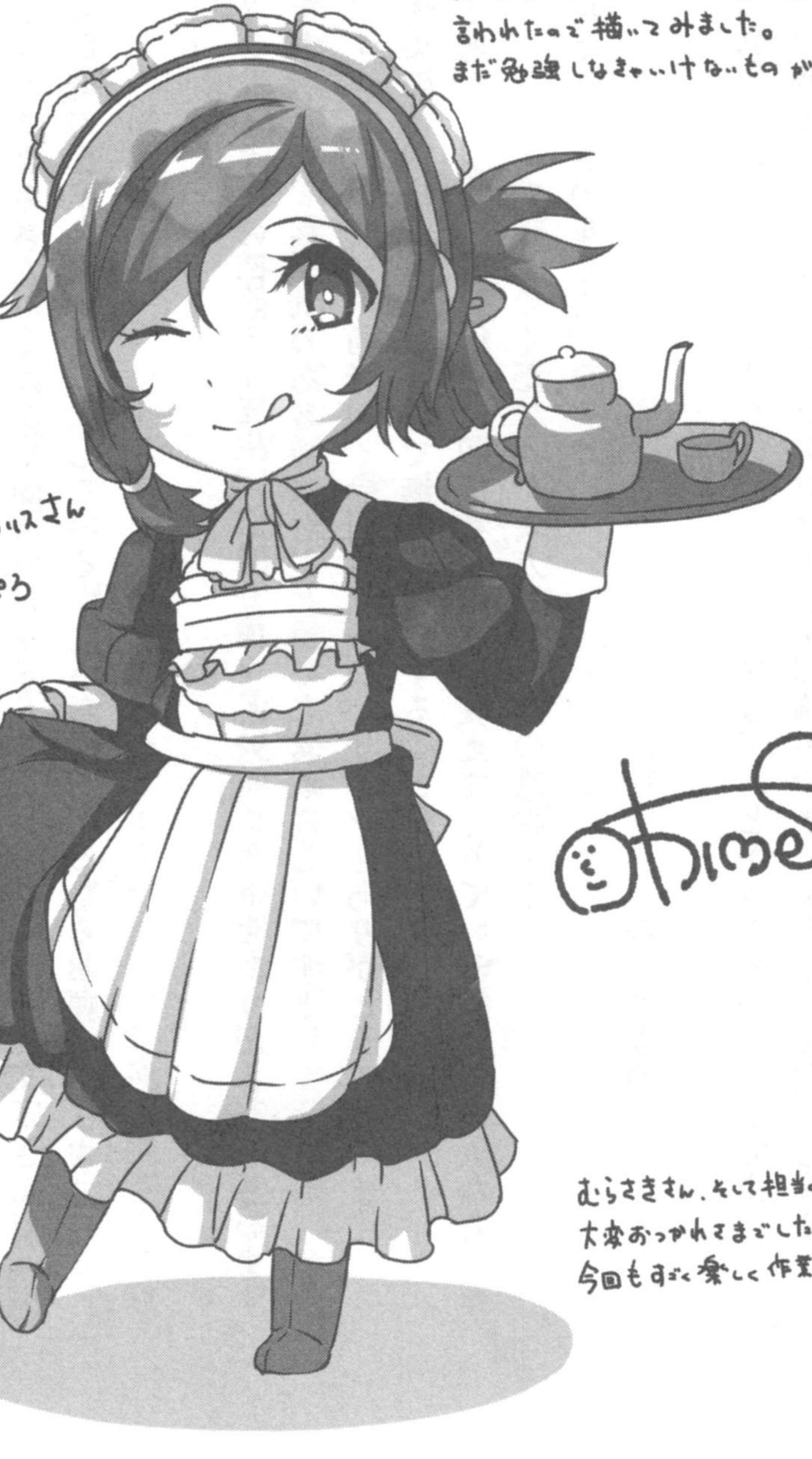
Translators — Skythewood
MythosIX

Editors — Chris S
Christian Lungu
Darkdhaos
RavenSlither
Skythewood

Book designer — Armaell

アルティーナ第3巻発売おめでとうございます＆お買い上げありがとうございます！

SDキャラを描いたところがあまり想像できないと
言われたので描いてみました。
まだ勉強しなきゃいけないものが多いです…



今日のクラリスさん
てへぺろ

himesuz

むらさきさん、そして担当の和田さん、
大変おつかれさまでした。
今回もすごく楽しく作業できました。